

Whippoorwill E-Comment

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The Joys of Birding

by Shannon Adams



Scrub Jay, Muir Forest, San Francisco, California. Herring Gulls in winter plumage, Portland, Oregon. A raft of immature eider ducks in Penobscot Bay, Maine. Northern Kingbird, Central Park, New York City. Osprey being mobbed by a pack of crows in the Pavilion Gardens in Charlottesville, Virginia. Swallow-tailed kite circling over Central Florida. Whooper Swan on the River Corrib, Galway, Ireland. These are but a few of the birds I've seen over the years since *Avian Ecology* (aka Ornithology), at Transylvania University taught by Dr. J. Hill Hamon. When I was a child growing up in Louisville, Kentucky, out in the suburbs, the Bald Eagle was placed on the endangered species list because of the use of DDT, a common pesticide that made the eagle's egg shells too fragile. Fortunately, the federal government's intervention worked and our national symbol bounced back and can be seen all along the Mississippi Flyway, even as far east

of the flyway as Louisville. We could hear the Canada geese in the fall when they migrated north. Now the geese seem to be permanent residents at our latitude. Climate change or part of the earth's natural cycle? My best friend's parents live on a farm outside of Grayson, KY. They keep bird feeders all year, and it's so much fun to sit in the kitchen on a winter morning and see who comes to eat. It's a who's who of permanent residents: cardinals, pine warblers, titmice, slate-colored juncos, black capped chickadees, rufous sided towhees, yellow bellied sapsuckers, various woodpeckers (large and small), and more I can't recall. They keep a copy of *Birds of North America*, same as the one I have, and as well worn. My copy goes with me wherever I go and the binoculars, too, if I remember to pack them! The thrill of spotting and identifying a new species, hearing a call knowing who it is, catching sight of a flash of color in bush or tree can't be beat. The male summer

tanager is a bright red while the



female is yellow. Its cousin, the scarlet tanager is the brightest red you can imagine, and unmistakable with its black wings.



I learned this past May the call of the Red Winged Blackbird, trying to attract a female. Bird watching is an exercise in looking, listening and remembering. And you can take this hobby around the world with you. J. Hill will recall the time I showed up on his back porch in May of 1996 with a copy of Birds of Europe and a bad case of the nerves. I was going out of the US for the first time and was scared to bits. Talking about the birds I might see in Ireland helped to calm the jangles. Happily, I got about a dozen new species for the life list. I hope to get to the desert Southwest and see the roadrunner, the pygmy

owl and the white throated swift. More time on the Gulf Coast for shorebirds. Although my life list is a meager 250 species, I've seen birds in places most people never get to go.

Outside my front door is a mature American holly tree. A pair of mockingbirds has just fledged their second clutch of young 'uns. It should get a little quieter around here. The Canada geese have raised six goslings and have now left the retention pond across the street. No more hissing parents herding their kids as they snacked on the grass in the front yard. No more goose poop on the sidewalk. Summer is moving on.

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Shannon Adams is one of a number of avid bird watchers in the AAPA. Others I know are Johanna Shipley, Gayle Mueller, and Linda Donaldson. There surely are others. Shannon and Linda know of my special life list of birds with unusual names – the extramarital lark, the furtive wee-wee, the rosy-rumped raven, and the Davenport goose! There are many levels of bird watching, most occurring in the field, but this short list is one collected in local bars with bird watching friends. It's great fun!

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