

Drama From My Back Yard Birds

05-27-2025 For Daily News

Lately my back yard birds have given me live theater in the air and on the ground. Their stage is a 5 by 10 patch of bare ground, left grass-less to receive my daily scattering of of millet, cracked corn and sunflower seeds in hopes of catching the avian eyes of birds of many kinds and colors.

Around such largess, drama can develop at almost any moment, giving me, their kitchen window spectator, dandy shows, some comic, some sad.

My stage has one prop, my over-pruned crab apple tree, which has finally regrown enough foliage to no longer resemble a saguaro cactus but, an atomic blast-shaped round-topped bush, with one long limb sticking out, signaling a left turn into the windows of our sun room.

The long arm creates a gallows from which I've hung several seed-serving feeders and a pair of suet holders, for birds seeking a fattier, meatier diet. And a hummingbird feeder for the exotics like orioles and ruby throats.

My cast of characters is not all avian; besides, birds, an occasional squirrel or cotton tail sneaks onto the stage and sometimes a sinister cat, dreaming of a song bird appetizer. The fur bearers create dramatic tension and realism. Any of the main cast can enter at almost any time, but cameo appearances by surprise-guests are always fun. This morning a bossy hen mallard swooped in and chased all the other critters out of the area. I powdered her tail with my Daisy Red Ryder; ducks I don't need – too messy too dirty and too greedy.

Curtain time comes when the seedy old guy finally leaves. Then come the cow birds, clad in buffalo camo - brown and black. They are encroachers,

bold and quite pushy, with their wicked way constantly edging closer to other feeding birds – a habit gotten by pushing siblings out of the nest.

Then enter the grackles with their hypnotic white eyes, and amazing tails; they love to “strike a pose.” This year red wings have joined them, with their bleeding shoulders and cheerful screedidelee.

Then come the nobler birds, the mourning doves, and downy woodpeckers, followed by the little guys, the finches, the chickadees, and the sparrows. These are the local repeat visitors who have discovered the joys of a reliable free lunch.

Two days back I witnessed a truly suspenseful scene. A brown thrasher had discovered how much he liked those berry-imbued suet cakes. He was pecking away when a big starling that had been coming to that cake daily, lit on the other side.

The two exchanged baleful stares unflinchingly for a full ten seconds. They were close to the same size, except that the thrasher had a longer tail and a slightly hooked beak. The starling had a bright yellow beak which he brandished bravely, but that was all bravado; he was the first to blink, turn tail and fly away.

That fit into the lore I had about starlings from my dad. He paid me 25 cents ea. for any I could shoot. The thrasher’s reputation is much better; he sings beautifully and lacks the curse the color black seems to carry with it, making most black birds targets.

But if the truth were known, each of those birds is the color God gave it. Sadly, the curse on the color black is a human invention. The poet,

Countee Cullen saw the irony: “Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:/ To
make a poet black/ And bid him sing.”

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