

BIRDING MEMORIES FROM OUR READERS



Saturday, January 24, 1987: Rarities at our feeding line in midwinter are few and far between and completely unpredictable, of course. A visitor, known in the birding lore as a "stray," came to our line from the Pacific Northwest in the body and feathers of a Varied Thrush and completely startled and exhilarated my birdwatching senses. Looking out with my binoculars to count juncos under the laurels, I was amazed to see this bird, for the first time ever, on the ground on about eight inches of snow. His orange and brown facial markings announced him in my mind so distinctly. He was there for ten or so seconds: 12:15 P.M. and again at 4:30 P.M.

This bird stayed around for about a month and a half, and a number of birding friends were equally charmed by the bird during his stay.

Eric Cutler, Dedham, Massachusetts



No matter how much I tried to think of my most memorable birding experience over the life of *Bird Observer*, I kept coming back to one event in the spring of 1975, May 10, to be precise. I was walking through Boxford State Forest when a blood-curdling scream broke the spring stillness: *kek-kek-kek-kek-kek-kek-kek*. Where had I heard a sound like that before? When was the only other time a bird had caused chills to run up and down my spine?

It was in the summer of 1963, when I was standing, absolutely alone, in an Ontario wilderness and heard a similar raucous call, turned, and saw a giant black-and-white woodpecker land on a dead tree and proceed to tear it apart in front of my eyes. I was riveted: the chills did not go away for several minutes.

But this time it was not a Pileated Woodpecker. It was an enraged goshawk, and it was coming at my head at a speed that gave me about one second to hit the ground. Now *that* was a thrill, one that was repeated several times in the course of my retreat. That bird was making a statement.

I experienced the phenomenon one other time, but I do not particularly care if I experience it much more. Not because it inspired fear (which it did not). Not because I do not want to interrupt the birds' nesting (which I do not). I think the real reason is that I do not want the memory of that moment diminished by repeated episodes. Repetition would not exactly take the thrill out of it, but it would make it less unexpected. I am certainly not going to avoid places where goshawks live, but that one experience is so indelible it will serve up a lifetime of memories. Because it was my most memorable birding experience, it needs no reinforcement.

Jim Berry, Ipswich, Massachusetts



Some of my favorite birding encounters took place not over rarities or life species in the hot spots of Mount Auburn or Plum Island, but among the more common varieties in my own suburban backyard.

Most impressive was the frosty December morning I looked out to see a starving Sharp-shinned Hawk resting on the lawn. After several hours' attempt to seek help, the local Animal Control netted the bird and deposited it at a local Science Center, where it recuperated for two weeks. Since its successful release, he returns every winter to haunt my bird feeders, much to my delight, albeit to the sparrows' dismay.

Then, there was the abandoned baby robin I raised. And most recently, a mockingbird with a fractured pelvis was my patient for five weeks. What a glorious sound to hear him sing from my bedroom, but how more glorious that he is now singing outside the window, coming to the doorstep for raisins.

As humans we have created so many obstacles to wildlife's survival; it is essential, even in a small way, to help a few survive. Not only is it a joyful reward to see that creature take flight again, but also one senses a universal bond, a common understanding between living things.

Update, Halloween 1992: *My sharpie has just returned again!*

dottie case [lowercase by choice], Needham Heights, Massachusetts



April 27, 1992, began as one of those days when everything goes wrong. I was having a difficult morning at home. I decided a bird walk was the cure, and as spring migration was picking up, I hoped to find something interesting. I started down the mowed path through our hayfield wondering what birds awaited me in the woods, when suddenly I flushed a large tawny-colored sandpiper. To my delight, it only flew a short distance, and I was able to observe it carefully for the next half-hour. I was ecstatic at this sighting, for I had often told my husband that given the habitat preferences of Upland Sandpipers, there was no reason why we could not have one. I feverishly jotted down details on the bird fearing no one would believe me. Fortunately, the bird lingered, allowing my husband to observe it as well. In fact, this Upland Sandpiper remained in our hayfield for four days, giving us ample opportunity to observe and photograph it. It is especially thrilling when such an unusual bird occurs in your own backyard.

Barbara Delorey, Chester, New Hampshire



I was standing in a grove of white pines at Broadmoor Sanctuary in Natick, when I heard a peeping sound about six feet from my head. Seeing nothing overhead, I looked at the ground and saw that I was nearly stepping on two Ruffed Grouse chicks that could not have been more than ten days old. I then saw the mother grouse standing about fifteen feet away. When she gave a few clucks, the two chicks ran over and climbed up into the highbush blueberry bushes that hung over the brook. As the mother grouse walked away through the leaves on the ground, the chicks followed her by running along the branches and fluttering from bush to bush over the water. Had I been a fox, I would have followed the scent of the mother and never known that the chicks were up in the bushes.

Eliot Taylor, Sherborn, Massachusetts

BIRD OBSERVER WELCOMES MATERIAL FOR PUBLICATION

Bird Observer would like to remind its readers that we welcome contributions for publication. These contributions can include field notes and observations, articles on where to find birds, reviews of bird-related literature or equipment, notes on conservation issues affecting bird populations or important habitats, bird identification difficulties, population surveys, photographs or drawings, and others. The masthead of each issue contains more specific information on article length and format.

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