

YARD BIRDS

Coming to New England from the farmlands of Pennsylvania, I knew that my new home had one serious requirement — a view. In January 1989 we moved to a hilltop home in Maynard. From the front doorstep the view extends 180 degrees over the towns of Stow, Maynard, and Sudbury. The backyard is small and ends with a beautiful rock wall and woodland now owned by the wildlife service, recently acquired from the government. My yard list encompasses anything I can see or hear from my property.

Arriving in winter, I promptly set up a feeder and suet log. The usual winter crowd of chickadees, titmice, White-breasted Nuthatches, and Downy Woodpeckers appeared and, to my delight, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Hairy Woodpeckers, and Red-breasted Nuthatches. New places always bring surprises. Gazing from my kitchen window one April morning, I was astounded to see a pair of Wood Ducks nestled next to each other on the branch of a huge white pine tree.

My main birding experience had been hawk watching, and I looked forward to autumn with anticipation. Hours spent searching the sky brought its rewards. On September 18, 1999, I counted 484 Broadwing Hawks (best day ever), 3 Merlins, 1 Peregrine, and 1 Bald Eagle along with 135 Monarch Butterflies. My favorite species seen yearly are goshawk, Peregrine Falcon, and Bald Eagle. Even nonbirding neighbors can see eagles — they're BIG — but have trouble with those high-flying Broadwings. I'm sure it does look strange to see me staring up at a clear blue sky at nothing, and counting out loud. While playing basketball with my son in the driveway that first fall, we looked up just as an immature Golden Eagle soared directly over our heads slightly above rooftop level. How was I to know it would be ten long years before I saw another one from my yard? My Golden Eagle count still stands at two. The extensive woodland edging the backyard yields special species like bobwhite, turkeys, singing Wood Thrushes, and a calling Whip-poor-will. The Great Horned Owl that landed on the rooftop, talons clicking on the shingles, and hooting loudly, will never be forgotten.

Each season brings its own share of wonderful birds. During spring migration I have seen a male Mourning Warbler (once), Indigo Buntings, Orchard Orioles, and Olive-sided Flycatchers. Last summer, after six years of waiting for them, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds found my sugar-water feeders and stayed all summer. Common Nighthawks migrate in late August, and 1998 was a banner year — 2,026 were counted from August 15–31. A male "Oregon" Junco spent the winter of 1997–1998 among my crowd of feeder birds. Redpolls, Pine Siskins, and Evening Grosbeaks visit the feeding station in winter, and occasionally a Northern Shrike, too. In January 1994, 31 Bohemian Waxwings descended on a fruited tree, feeding and calling musically. Over 130 species of birds have visited or been seen from my yard. I am keeping a close watch; who knows what will appear next?

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