

FIELD NOTES

Rhythms


David Larson

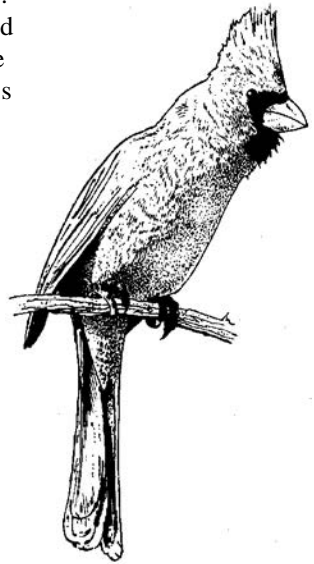
When you live in a place for a long time (maybe too long), you get used to the daily and seasonal rhythms of the location. At the feeders, the chickadees, titmice, and cardinals come and go at different times of day. The hordes of House Sparrows dash from the multiflora rose hedge to the sunflower seed feeder, and then retreat, like a wave crashing on the shore. In the winter, you can count on a Sharpie and a Coop hanging around, picking off the odd dove or passerine. A few juncos appear magically with the first snow, while a Carolina Wren usually provides a background *tea-kettle*.

Susan and I lived in Stoughton for 15 years. In our small but private yard we developed a decent list of 94 species of birds. Our last new yard bird was just this past June 23, as Susan noticed 2 circling Northern Goshawks overhead. Years of winter FeederWatches for Cornell, along with serious feeding, got us up to a high of 21 Northern Cardinals at one time.

In late November we moved to Bradford, MA. Our first official yard bird was a Belted Kingfisher (huh?). Well, part of our yard is a red maple swamp with a stream, so I guess that makes sense. A walk down the driveway to get the mail last weekend yielded a yard Winter Wren. Not bad. We finally got some feeders up last week. Now we have a flock of tree sparrows dominating, with good numbers of juncos, and various other predictable passerines. Yesterday, a Red-bellied Woodpecker showed up and pushed our new yard list to 21 species. Fortunately, the local House Sparrows have ignored us and concentrate on our neighbor's offerings.

The peculiar thing is that the rhythms are wrong. It's not just the lack of House Sparrows, but the timing seems off. Cardinals are not the first and last to visit the feeders each day (and we've only seen two!). The juncos and tree sparrows visit in staccato bursts and fight each other all the while. There's no evening cacophony of Canada Geese moving to a roosting spot. We've yet to hear a Carolina Wren. Most unsettling.

Intellectually, I know that over time we'll get in sync with the local rhythms and will feel at home. But for now we are strangers in a strange but promising land. I hope the new owners in Stoughton are feeding the cardinals. 



NORTHERN CARDINAL, ANON.