

the reactor

By Paul Azevedo

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When you think about it, birds can be some of our most enjoyable neighbors. Certainly they are in my block. Sometimes a gull flies over, and I'm reminded of how close the ocean is. Then there's a resident flock of black-birds (or starlings, I'm not sure which) which do their thing on Linda Mar lawns.

Lately some of the younger members of my family have been interested in learning about the songs of birds. We've also been trying to figure out which species feed at our backyard seed tray. The more you learn, the more fun the local birds can be.

THE BIRDS aren't safe from predators. True, there are few hawks or owls in the area, but there are cats. One big fluffy orange cat from down the block slunk into my yard and leaped five feet to my feeder, where he injured a little sparrow.

It looked for all the world like Sylvester and tweetybird. Predators are part of a bird's life, but if you have a cure for marauding cats, let me know.

The first bird house I put up, several years ago, was a thing of beauty made from a fancy kit, well shaped, shiny. It stood vacant until it was well-weathered and shabby, after which it was used for three years running.

I TOOK IT down this year, full of straw and feathers and trash, and put up a house I had pieced together from scrap wood and surplus nails, not a square corner or a straight line in the whole thing. My perfectionist carpenter brother would have told me it was for the birds. It was. They were hauling straw and nesting materials into it within two days.

When I realized that the rental market was as tight in birdhouses as in human apartments, I slapped together another home in a few minutes, and within two hours a pair of sparrows was filling it with straw and pine needles.

I CAN ONLY wish that

our advertisers got action that fast from a Tribune rental ad. But then our ads don't usually involve free rent. (I refuse to say "rent for a song.")

With the obvious need, I built a third house. So far it isn't occupied, but perhaps it will be soon. Unless, as my eldest son assumes, it blows down in the next high wind.

Besides the wrens, house finches, and sparrows, and others which visit the seed trays, another couple whose visits I look forward to is a tiny pair of hummingbirds which come to feed at the pittosporum blossoms. Pittosporum flowers aren't much to look at, but the hummers

like them. The hummers are a delightful blur of whirring wings and sparkling midjet personalities.

I've noticed that since the ivy and roses and honeysuckle have grown up that we have many more birds. I'm sure they like the cover and the perches.

TWENTY FIVE years ago I read a book by Willy Ley called "Dragons in Amber." Two chapters dealt with the Ginkgo and the dawn redwood, both living fossils, both of which rightfully should have died out 70 million years ago or so.

Today I have one of each tree in my back yard. The birds enjoy them too,

and sometimes a dozen sparrows will be in the dawn redwood at once, chattering away in the early dawn. It's nice to share my memories of a book I cherish with birds who enjoy it too.

A bird doesn't need much. Feed, a little suet, a nesting place and a perch. We're lucky, especially in Linda Mar. We're not far from the brush cover of the Montara mountains. The visitors from the hills only need to be made welcome.

UP ON Pedro Point, Karl and Eva Strutz have made a lot of birds happy with a serving of cracked grain over the years. It's not hard.

One of the best sources

for information on local birds is the EIR for Freeway 380. It contains a long list. Among the visitors are Golden Eagles. Residents include titmice, scrub jays, Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds, phoebes, cedar waxwings, warblers, ruby crowned kinglets, western tanagers, goldfinches, towhees, and many more.

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