

Sounds of Spring and Summer

Every day more and more of the summer bird residents are taking their places among the permanent residents as this is a busy time of the year for all birds. The males are trying to establish their territories, defend the territory from intruders and seek a mate while the females are looking for nest sites, adjusting their diets to produce healthy eggs and, like the males, looking for attractive mates. We as birders do not see much of what is going on in the daily lives of our bird neighbors, but we can hear them as they tune up for the summer chorus.

When I was out in the garden a few days ago I heard a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, my first indication that these summer birds have arrived. As this bird is also known as the "rainbird," its appearance is very timely because we need rain again. This cuckoo gets its nickname because it often calls just prior to the arrival of summer thunderstorms. I hope to hear soon the rapid staccato of "kuk-kuk-kuk-kuk" followed by a "kakakowlp-kwolp," a series which sounds as if the cuckoo it tried to swallow all of those "kuks" at one time.

Another spring and summer sound is Northern Mockingbird's seemingly never ending assortment of phrases, hash calls, imitated calls of other birds and general sounds the bird recently heard. When this bird does not have a mate, it might carry on this singing binge for days, not stopping even at night. It is fun to watch him add a little choreography to his concert as he rises from his perch and descends back to his perch with a few wing flutters and aerobatics.

The beautiful and sleek Scissor-tailed Flycatcher adds cackling sounds from a lofty perch in the area. As he gets excited in doing his song, he, like the mockingbird will take to the air and perform aerobatic maneuvers during which he opens and closes his long black and white tail feathers. It is during these flights that he displays the bright peach red colors generally hidden under his wings. The sights and sounds of this flycatcher is one of the better displays of the spring and summer.

As the sun sets after a long day, the Chuck-wills-widow tunes up for his all night calling sessions. A member of the nighthawk family, the Chuck-wills-widow makes a four note call which sounds like its name. I sometimes wonder when they take a break to catch a bug or two

for dinner, as they can call for long periods. If the birds sets up his station near an open bedroom window, it can be a little nerve racking. Several times I have had to go out and "encourage them" to move further away so that I could get a good night's sleep.

Having grown up in Central Texas, I have fond memories of the summer calls of another nighthawk, the Common Nighthawk, or "bullbat." Unfortunately they are not as common in our area as they were twenty years ago, but it is always fun to hear them make their whirring and booming sounds during a dive in their flight. They seem to be more common further north than here in Central Texas.

I have not heard from some members of the summer chorus yet, like the Painted Bunting, but in time they will all be at their stations chiming in with songs and calls. I have mentioned only a few of the songsters, but they make for summer fun.

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