

Nature Notebook

Robina Rader

WINTER

The Bird Feeder I

It's a busy place in this bitter weather.
Finches and chickadees, sparrows and jays
grab a bite and head for cover.
They all want takeout today –
a hawk circles overhead.

The Bird Feeder II

Two blue jays are hogging the bird seed;
sparrows on the railing wait their turn;
a junco hops across the deck picking up leftovers.
Shadow of a hawk and they take off in all directions.
A panicked sparrow bounces off the window,
stunned but safe.

The Bird Feeder III

Heavy traffic at the feeder all day –
like people raiding the stores for milk and bread,
the birds are stocking up like crazy –
they know the forecast.

The Bird Feeder IV

Squirrel is guarding the bird feeder.
He can't quite reach it himself,
but he's keeping the birds away.

The Bird Feeder V

The squirrel situation has escalated;

now there are two of them, and the larger
one is a serious seed thief.

The Bird Feeder VI

Squirrel! Go away!

He is ON the hanging feeder!
He leaps to the railing
sending the bird feeder spinning,
spraying seed far and wide.

The Bird Feeder VII

The sparrows throw more seed overboard than they eat.
Ducks from the pond next door have found the discards;
I see their webbed footprints in the snow.

Beyond the Bird Feeder I

A red fox trots across the snow-covered field –
what a bushy tail!
He hesitates here and there, then stops.
He sniffs the ground, jumps straight up,
and dives nose first into the snow.
He comes up empty and trots away.

Beyond the Bird Feeder II

In the middle of the night, I happened to glance out the window.
Moonlight on the snow lit the scene, and what to my wondering eyes should appear,
but a herd of deer walking down the street.
They moved with purpose, stopping to nibble on anything they could find.
They chewed up the holly and made great inroads on the arborvitae.
The winter has been so harsh for so long that I didn't have the heart to chase them away.
It's going to be really easy to mow around the shrubbery this summer.

Beyond the Bird Feeder III

Two Great Horned Owls live in the neighborhood.
We hear them any time between sundown and sunrise.
Hooty gives long low hollow-sounding hoots;
his friend Hootie-Patootie answers in a random staccato.

SPRING

At the Lake I

We were opening the cabin for the season. I had gone to the minivan for another load, when I saw, loping along the lakeside path as if he owned the place, a very large, very glossy, very black bear. He looked healthy and powerful. He stopped suddenly, realizing that something had changed since his last visit.

The back of the van was open, and I had a three-year-old with me, so I was a bit nervous. The bear and I stared at each other for what seemed like a long time. I blew the horn—it sounded really feeble, but the bear decided to retreat and regroup while he figured out what our invasion meant to his daily routine.

Goodbye, Bruno.

At the Lake II

Robins are nesting, and they're really nervous about my arrival. Last year a pair of robins got so anxious that they abandoned their nest, eggs and all. Now there's a nest under the porch, which I have to pass to get to the boats. The robins go crazy every time. I'm not the only one upsetting them. I just saw two robins chasing a chipmunk!

At the Lake III

A family of water snakes lives in the retaining wall. I usually see them first when I run the lawn mower along their wall. They startle me as they slither over the wall, into the lake and swim away. If they become annoying, I throw old golf balls at them until they relocate for the summer.

SUMMER

Beyond the Bird Feeder IV

A hawk landed on the shed roof,
and stared at the Mallards on the pond. They stared back.
The hawk glided down to the water's edge for a better look.
He sidled awkwardly along, then flew to the other side of the pond.
The Mallards stayed on the water. They weren't about to challenge this guy in the air.
He hung out there for about half an hour before he gave up and left.
Nothing for you here, Hawkie.

At the Lake IV

The motion-detector light woke me at about three A.M. I went to the window and watched a large, muscular, scruffy bobcat stroll arrogantly across the yard. He stopped to sniff a few things, and lifted his leg to leave his mark on a stump. He wandered on into the woods, still in no hurry. He disappeared and the light went out.

At the Lake V

Bruno again. I was having breakfast on the porch, looking out across the lake, when a bear emerged from the underbrush on the far shore and entered the water. I watched him swim all the way across the lake and disappear into the woods near the marina just up the road.

FALL

A Sunday Drive

Out along Little Pine Creek, we noticed a couple of cats at the side of the road. That seemed strange, as there were no houses nearby. When we got closer we realized they were baby bobcats. (bobkittens?) One scampered across the road and watched us pass. The other had ducked back into the weeds. Mom was not in sight, but probably nearby.

We drove on a mile or two farther, and spotted a large bird sitting on the roadside, eating something. As we approached, he took off and flew along the road ahead of us—a

Golden Eagle with a wingspan wider than the car! And there was another, flying over a secluded lake. Wow! What a trip!

Migration I

Skeins in the sky
Flying south in V-formation
Following Summer

Migration II

A Red Shouldered Hawk –
not a common sight, not a common sound.
It was his shrill cry that brought me outside to look.
This is September—he's just passing through.
I hope he comes this way again—
what a beautiful bird!

Beyond the Bird Feeder V

Crows love football weekends,
especially late games and windy days.
Alumni tailgaters and inebriated fraternity guys
strew trash and food scraps everywhere.
After the game, a cleaning crew picks up recycling containers
and all the garbage that has made it into bags.
As soon as the coast is clear, crows and other scavengers move in to claim their bounty.

At the Farm

There's a soft rain this morning—more of a mist—just the kind of weather that brings out the wild turkeys. The flock—I count seventeen today—spreads out in a line and advances across the upper field like a fleet of lawnmowers.

Other farm

A flock of starlings. dirty, noisy, and annoying, need to be discouraged. Will sits at the attic window with his pellet gun, waiting. When a starling alights in the red maple, he aims and fires. The starling falls, but never hits the ground—an alert hawk swoops in and snatches it in midair.

CROWS

A crow landed on the deck railing. We have a bird feeder there in the winter, but we've never had a crow on the deck in any season. A second crow, slightly larger, came and sat beside the first. Crow #1 opened its mouth, and crow #2 stuffed something into it. Then they both flew off.

Commotion out front. A crow lands awkwardly in the arborvitae—a crow, crash-landing! It may have been a young one, inexperienced. Two smaller birds had been chasing it. The crow made its way through to the other side of the tree, but the small birds went after it again until it fled the area, and the noise level subsided.

I've started putting out leftovers for the crows, down at the tree line by the stream. Recently I bought some dog food to put out when I didn't have leftovers for them. I served it on a paper plate, and watched from the kitchen window. A crow landed a few yards from the plate, approached it, then backed away. He approached again, got a little closer, and walked warily around the plate. Backed off again. Another crow came along, made a tentative move toward this new whatever, and took a bite. Evidently he expressed approval, because a minute later there were five crows in the back yard, gobbling dog food. When the plate was empty, they flipped it over to make sure they hadn't missed anything. Now they have to get there early, because a blue jay has discovered the gourmet treat.

To be continued...