

FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

Doing My Bit For Birds

I've always had a soft spot for birds. Not sure why. But our feathered friends kinda get to me. I marvel at their ability to stay effortlessly airborne. I'm grateful for the colour and song they add to my life. And, from somewhere deep inside, I feel SORRY for them ...

People talk about "a dog's life" – but, if you ask me, a BIRD's life is 10 times worse. We ignore them, overlook them, chase them off, and run them down. We complain when they nest in our roofs, curse when they poop on our cars, abuse them for waking us up, and insult them by calling them names.

AWFUL names!

I don't know who's responsible for naming birds, but they should be sacked. And if you don't believe me, just Google 'weird bird names'. I mean, who in their right mind would call a harmless, innocent, pretty little bird a *fluffy-backed tit babbler* ... or a *yellow-bellied sapsucker* ... or a *red-footed boobie* ... or a *rough-faced shag*?

I didn't make these up – they're REAL! And some of the Latin names they've given



birds are even awfuller. I mean, YOU try saying *phal-acrocorax carunculatus* without giggling ... or *hemispingus superciliaris* without stuttering ... or *brachypteracias leptosomus* without feeling you've caught some dreadful disease.

It's embarrassing, I reckon – don't you agree? But we've gotta walk the walk, not just talk the talk. So I'm trying, in my own small way, to CHANGE things for the birds who frequent our place. I'm being nicer to them ... kinder to them ... smiling at them when they land in my trees ... and listening to them when they sing. I've taken photos of them, read books about them, and bought a pair of binoculars to draw them a little closer.

I've become a late-start bird-watcher, I guess you'd say. And our cat has, too, albeit for less-charitable reasons. We often sit out on the deck together, gazing up into the leafy branches and planning our next move ...

My first move was a bit of a flop. And the nesting-box that I thoughtfully placed in the tree out by our letterbox has not yet, to my knowledge, been visited by a single nest-seeking bird. Which is mildly disappointing.

My second move was equally unsuccessful. And the orange nectar-dish that hangs on a high-up limb near our pool has sadly, to date, attracted only ants. Which is also disappointing. Because I've seen hummingbirds drinking from orange nectar-dishes in South America. (No, Doris, we don't have hummingbirds here – but I had hoped fantails might give it a try.)

My third move, thankfully, IS producing results. And if you want to pop around one morning after breakfast, I'll gladly give you a demo.

I purchased this seed-feeder, you see, from our garden shop. Plus a large bag of wild bird seed. And with the help of an extra-long pole from under the house, I hung the thing in the topmost branches of our flowering cherry.

Within minutes, a sparrow arrived to check it out. Then a greenfinch. Then more sparrows, and more greenfinches. And, in no time at all, there were dozens of them having a go, pecking my seed-mix like all their Christmasses had come at once, flapping and dive-bombing each other and generally going nuts.

And the same thing has happened each morning since!

Our flowering cherry has become a mecca for my cute feathered friends. They empty that seed-feeder by lunch-time, and keep coming back for more. They've never had it so good – and I've never had so much fun.

Our cat's having fun, too. She hides in the hedge directly below the birds, staring up at them hungrily until they've finished eating. Then she wanders inside with seed-husks clinging to her fur like a bad case of dandruff.

I suspect she needs counselling. But I'm not sure who to ask.

Got any ideas? 

JOHN (GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER/EDITOR) AGREES WITH WILLIE NELSON, WHO OBSERVED: "THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORM – BUT THE SECOND MOUSE GETS THE CHEESE!"

THORT



Men who have pierced ears are better prepared for marriage. They've experienced pain and bought jewellery.