

"We Have Been Visited, Twice!"

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Our decision to pursue the "third trimester" of our lives settling into the surrounds of an oak motte on a small slice of a legacy family ranch in the Gruene/New Braunfels area has proven to be a journey of surprises and adventures. Many unanticipated opportunities and challenges have come our way as we settled into our "contemporary" barn of modest, serviceable size for this chapter. The avian gifts keep on giving! We had lived in major flyways primarily along the mighty Mississippi and its tributaries to see, hear, and enjoy the seasonal migrations that were quite regular. There were other surprises from time to time like arctic owls one year.

In our sixteen-plus years perched among wildlife and pasture life, a surprise for me has been the rich and amazing variety of avian dwellers and sojourners. Some 332 species have been observed in Comal County! Oh, what a delight it has been to note the varieties of song, call, plumage, and behaviors. Even the roadrunner has seemed to want to play hide and seek along an occasional walk. The equally interesting, but less welcome, extended presence of a rogue tom turkey contributed in his visit many photos and stories. By far the most impressive visits have been two occasions when our yard and pasture beyond were filled with robins. They seemed hungry, did a great job of aerating the soil as they found satisfying morsels. Their desire for water, particularly in an extended stay following our deep freeze in 2021, led to our placing buckets and a few other receptacles for extra water. Their continuous visits for dips and sips were part of an impressive social organization as they lined up awaiting a turn.

At night the grand limbs in the trees surrounding us were convenient perches, or, a new replacement group came in for a next round. Interesting, too, was how resident and other visiting birds went about their own pursuits with no signs of belligerency. In this historic time of human cruelty and land cruelty and land snatching, perhaps our avian friends could offer some lessons! This year, the robins returned to their more regular flyways, or, so it seems with no sightings. Both visits were memorable!

Another impressive moment was an otherwise calm and serene night when there was a steady chorus of chatter by hundreds if not thousands of birds that settled into the trees and cover across the ranch and neighboring properties. An experienced ornithologist explained that if high elevation currents along a flyway interfere, the migrating birds may settle in for rest and protection until favorable navigating currents are restored. How amazing and memorable the entire experience! Others in the area exclaimed, "oh, we heard and had them, too!" Wonders of healthy nature!

If you have not experienced the varieties of avian dwellers and the rich variety of migratory groups that come our way, treat yourself to observe and even provide some respite waters and foods where appropriate. Try a trail trek and take along some field glasses for close, quiet observations. It's a wondrous treat!

How do we sustain such visitations? Truth be told, there are frequent travelers that come our way. In Texas it is reported that one in every three migratory birds come through our flyways. Those of us near the Guadalupe River or frequenters of other major Texas riverbeds get to behold this treat. Protecting and setting aside open lands for the wild to thrive should be a passion shared by us all! Share your own observations and images at www.comalconservation.org.

