**THE BIRDS — in Song and Flight!**By Frank Dietz
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In the days of our 2020 quarantine when so much came to a halt, an uncanny silence became notable. Flights overhead were rare. Traffic on roadways and rails nearly ceased. It was the perfect moment for an amazing symphonic crescendo in the avian world. Songs and calls in the woods and across expanses of acreage stood out quite notably. I remarked to Karen about our good fortune in having both cover and open space around us. I was ushered back to my earliest life memories with birds.

Many of my early boyhood summer nights were spent sleeping on my Grandfather's screened porch. His small coastal farmstead was graced with grand oaks and tall pines. Early to bed meant the evening transition as some birds headed for their roosts and nests while dusk introduced the nocturnally gifted along with other woodsy chatter. It was a wondrous way to get a restful night. Dawn brought an early excitement to the new morning as the wooded areas came alive with activity, song as well as call among the birds I'd begun to regard as my special friends. This spring and summer have connected me with those early years of observation and listening. One of our Hill Country gifts that bring so many surprises with the seasons is the rich variety and rotation of the birds that share life near our rivers and creeks as well as in the canopied cover near and far. Several have nested and displayed their offspring with caution nearby. Others have come and gone this way in seasonal migratory journeys.

Unforgettable is the night when for some unknown reason migrating birds settled in the trees around us in such abundance that sleep was brief that night. We wondered and worried until they took leave and were again on their way. Other years we've had morning visits on occasions from scores of robins filling the open areas before taking leave and heading on their way. In dry stretches (which we have more of than the birds, wildlife and I care for!) a sprinkler or our outdoor shower can produce quite a gathering. It's much more fascinating than any cocktail party I have ever been invited to! Recently the elusive rain crows (aka yellow billed cuckoos) came for refreshment.

My professional life familiarized me with the positive contributions birds and their habits and playfulness have contributed to coping and lifting burdened human spirits. Even some survivors in the death camps of the holocaust found birds to strengthen their coping.

My early life cataloguing of varieties of birds native or migrating and their voices plays again! I marveled then and marvel again that so much song and beauty can come from such small beings. Their industriousness and tenacity impress as well!

In a time when we receive weekly postings of more acreage being divided for home and commerce, the urgency and wisdom of protecting and setting aside habitat seems smart as well as necessary. The Comal County Conservation Alliance (comalconservation.org) enlists the helpfulness of those wishing to set aside some protected parcels. In addition to the oft mentioned wooded areas adjacent to Fischer Park and on the former El Rancho Cima Scout Ranch (Devil's backbone), I bet you can think of some land and habitat meriting protection.

Engage with us virtually during this "season of selah." Plan on joining us when in-person gatherings for exploration and discovery resume! And, check out our website! Once splendid open spaces get divided, it's irreversible! Many migratory and local birds will likely reroute and/or relocate to other flyways and nesting areas. They lose the precious waterways and lake open areas and we lose their gifts of color and song. Let's go forward with sensitivity and a measure of stewardship while we have time and space!