

Backyard Clashes - By Dr. Warren Hollar

The blanket of snow provided over the weekend provides a clearer view of natural interactions that can add humor to a day where we are snowbound in our homes. To add to this backyard showcase of wildlife interaction, I make my usual treks to hardware stores to buy bags of black oil sunflower seeds used to restock my backyard bird feeders before the start of inclement weather. Although the humorous show of bird and animal interaction is always there, a day where the ground is covered with snow seems to triple the bird and animal activity near the feeders.

I tend to be a casual bird watcher, but on a cold and icy day, the show is much better than the fare found on television and definitely better than all the kids' electronic games. Recently, I decided to add to the show by scattering some of the bird seed along the railing on my deck. After this, the show really began with the arrival of seed-eating species such as the American Goldfinch, Carolina Wren, Black-capped Chickadee, Blue Jay, Red-Headed Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal and Mourning Dove. We've heard the term pecking order which in the case of wild birds often involves determining the "top birds," "bottom birds," and how the rest fit in as they seek access to food and mates.

My wife and I took turns observing the action. Our

first humorous pecking order segment started with the snowbirds (dark-eyed juncos and such). The snow birds were lined up like soldiers on the rail and took turns pushing each other off the rail. It was if they had choreographed their movement. It wasn't very long until other smaller seed-eaters showed up to establish their dominance. They settled in on the rail until a bright red male cardinal with his crest reminiscent of a Catholic cardinal's mitre arrived. He was the top bird for a while until the blue jay came diving and squawking to the rail and scattered those birds present. Soon a gray-blue cloud of mourning doves fluttered to the rail followed by a red-headed woodpecker. He chose to perch on the side of the rail while reaping his share of the goodies. All was well until the giant of the backyard lumbered on the scene to incur the wrath of my wife. You guessed it! Mr. Squirrel had arrived on the scene. We were angry at the invader for stealing the bird seed. He was relentless. Even after being shoed away and jumping some 15 feet the ground, he was soon back on the deck munching away at the seeds. Having fought this battle before, I knew the only answer was to let the birds depend on the seed in the squirrel proof feeder which was some thirty feet from the house. Earlier attempts to have the feeder closer to the house

had only resulted in Mr. Squirrel showing his acrobatic skills in jumping from the roof of the house to the top of the feeder some fifteen feet high. The ultimate king and queen of the backyard birds, a pair of red-tailed hawks, occasionally make diving swoops toward any unsuspecting bird or small animal in the backyard. I also have a fish pond beyond my backyard where I feed a variety of ducks that arrive during the winter. Interestingly, if I go to feed the ducks in a camouflage rain jacket, they fly away. If I am in a regular jacket, they come readily toward me to receive the stale bread I spread on the water.

I'm sure many readers have their own humorous stories to tell about the backyard bird and animal antics. This list of antics may involve cats and birds, bald men and bombing blue jays, crows, and their educated antics, etc.

I found some interesting facts as I researched this column including:

1. The technical name for the song birds or perching birds is passerine. They include over half of all bird species with over 5,000 identified species, more than twice the number as the largest mammal orders.
2. The wild birds in North Carolina include a recorded 469 species. One of the best known is the Northern Cardinal, our state bird.
3. Bird watching and bird counting involves large numbers of people in North Carolina. A number of bird watching groups are active in the state.
4. Many types of bird feeders are available for purchase. Hardware stores and specialty stores stock many different kinds of feeders. I saw a program on the many types of feeders on the Alexander Government Channel. The program originated at Johnson's Mill on Highway 64 in Taylorsville.
5. Many nursing homes allow residents to have bird feeders outside their windows.
6. The Nifty Fifty is a mini-guide to the birds of North Carolina. It includes descriptions, images, video and songs of 50 of the most often observed birds of North Carolina. This information may be downloaded from birdzilla.com. Wikipedia also has a page where the pictures of all common birds may be downloaded.
7. Some of the major divisions of birds you might see in your backyard and number of species include: nightjars (5); swifts; hummingbirds (10); kingfishers; woodpeckers, sapsuckers, flickers (9); tyrant flycatchers (20); shrikes; vireos(8); jays, crows, magpies, ravens (4); larks; swallows, martins

(8); chickadees, titmice (4); nuthatches(3); tree-creepers; wrens (6) kinglets (2); gnatcatchers; old world flycatchers; thrushes (10); mockingbirds and thrashers (4); starlings; wagtails pipits (3); waxwings; longspurs, snow buntings (4); warblers (42); sparrows, towhees, juncos (26); cardinals, saltators, grosbeaks (11); blackbirds, meadowlarks, cowbirds, grackles, orioles (15); finches (11) old-world sparrows and

barn owl; typical owl (8).

Unless you are a full-fledged ornithologist or long-time bird watcher the sheer number of types of birds should influence us to just stick with knowing some of the basic types of birds and enjoying the frolics they show in our backyards. Oh, we are also on watch to see the eagle that was recently spotted near our home. We can still think of the arrival of the red-breasted robins, but we

know springtime is many months away! Who knows what to expect with the ever-changing weather!

Sources:

- http://www.birdzilla.com/state-based-information2/north_carolina-3128.html
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_birds_of_North_Carolina
- <http://www.wild-bird-watching.com/>

Raising awareness of people experiencing homelessness

Editor's Note: This article was written by a senior at Alexander Central High School as part of her senior project.

By Kristina Zink

In Alexander County, an exact number of people who are homeless is unknown, but the number is still growing. In the United States, there are 549,000 Americans who are experiencing homelessness on any night. Worldwide, there are 767 million people that live on less than \$1.90.

43.1 Million Americans live below the poverty line. In some cities, they have made it illegal to share food in public places or lie down in parks, and even constructing spikes as to keep people experiencing homelessness from resting on benches. The Hickory Salvation Army homeless shelter allows people to stay the span of three months, but once one leaves, it is a six month wait to return. As a society, the resources and knowledge to end homelessness are there, we just need the will to eradicate homelessness.

For my Graduation Project, I chose to sleep outside in a cardboard box. This was chosen so I could participate in National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week (NHHAW) this year. NHHAW lasted from November 10th through November 18th, and NHHAW is hosted by the National Coalition for the Homeless. NHHAW is the week before Thanksgiving and gives people an opportunity to raise awareness in their area. Groups spend the week holding a series of educational services, fundraising, and hosting advocacy events such as sleepouts. Sleepouts are held in a public place to bring needed attention to the issue. I was unable to find an event in the state of North Carolina to attend, so I slept outside on the 18th to increase my understanding of part of the experience of homelessness.

Some of the individuals who are homeless in Alexander County, have

actually slept in the building that used to be a hospital in Taylorsville, and have also been sleeping in bathrooms at a baseball field. When an individual is homeless, one worries about where they will sleep that night, how will they be able to get food, take a shower, use the bathroom, or being able to get basic necessities. These are all things that we take for granted. We have warm house to come home to, three meals every day, showers and bathrooms available to us. Single parents, children, families, couples, and lone individuals not only have to protect themselves from other people, but from the weather and animals. It is getting cold out and not everyone has the ability to just go and get winter gear to stay warm. Individuals are staying in the woods in a tent, sleeping somewhere in a box, or sleeping outside with no shelter, some of them do not sleep stay in shelters because they believe it is too confined for them. Making sure not only ones self has somewhere to stay or something to eat, but when a person as a small child, the worry and stress is doubled. They never know how much they will need to stay warm, especially extremely cold weather. To try and get a better understanding of one of the many challenges people experiencing homelessness face, I decided to sleep outside. While I still had a warm meal beforehand, sleeping outside in a box was something that was new to me, but not always unfamiliar to those experiencing homelessness. I had to worry about one or two of the things people experiencing homelessness have to, sleeping outside in freezing temperatures and animals such as foxes and coyotes coming to my box. Can you imagine having to worry about any of these things? We take so many things for granted, from the warm clothes we wear during cold days to the roof above our heads at night.

Homelessness is everywhere, and it is apparent in

our county. We ignore the things that need our attention when we think they are not bothering us. People can help individuals experiencing homelessness in many ways. One can donate jackets and blankets. There is a food donation box located outside of the First United Methodist Church beside the cafe doors in Taylorsville at 54 East Main Avenue, Township of Taylorsville, NC. One can also volunteer at a local homeless shelter in or soup kitchen or donate to organizations like the National Coalition for the Homeless. Another idea would be to turn old shopping centers or building into homeless shelters.

Homelessness is something that can be eradicated, if we all join efforts as a society to do so. Homelessness is something that should not exist. As a society, we have every means necessary, including the will of individuals, to get rid of homelessness all together. Joining the ideas of a society together, can end homelessness in our country.

References

- Cooper, M. (2018, February 15). Life in the woods: North Carolina's growing homeless tent camps are an open secret. *Scalawag*. Retrieved from <https://www.scalawagmagazine.org/2018/02/life-in-the-woods-north-carolinas-growing-homeless-tent-camps-are-an-open-secret/>
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- National Coalition for the Homelessness, & National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness. (Eds.). (2018). The facts. Retrieved November 14, 2018, from Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week website: <https://hhweek.org/hunger-and-homelessness/>

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