

COMMUNITY COLUMNIST

Who's flying in your 'hood?

When my neighbor and I take our morning walk at about dawn each day, we chatter away and still take time to marvel at the sunrise, other neighbors' yards and flowers and the local birds. As fading darkness turns to light, bird songs fill the air.

I thought I was doing well attracting hummingbirds to the feeder in my back yard and tossing out occasional bread crumbs that attracted sparrows, mockingbirds, great-tailed grackles, woodpeckers and, yes, pigeons. But I have another neighbor who likes to brag that he has identified 114 species of birds from his Tempe home.

David Pearson is a research professor in the School of Life Sciences at Arizona State University. He has been bird watching from his back yard since 1988 and keeps a computer log of his finds. He scans for birds from his kitchen window as he is making breakfast.

"If I can see it flying over from standing in my backyard, it counts," says Pearson.

Pearson has spotted geese, herons and cormorants as they migrate. The Pearson backyard is full of native shrubs and trees, and Pearson's wife, Nancy, plants flowers year round that attract birds.

Apparently our Tempe neighborhood, near Shalimar Golf Course, is full of birds due

to the open space and abundant vegetation plus our proximity to Tempe Town Lake.



GAIL FISHER

Pearson says he has friends in south Tempe who don't have nearly as many species. It's the mature vegetation of north Tempe that attracts species such as the hooded oriole, Cooper's hawk and even the red-tailed hawk.

You may remember that last December there was a lot of media coverage about the New York City red-tailed hawk, Pale Male, who lives on the ledge (or should I say edge) of an upscale New York co-op. After having his nest removed, the Audubon Society and the 927 Fifth Avenue co-op board reached an agreement to restore the pigeon spikes that held in place the nest of Pale Male and his mate, Lola.

Since the early 1990s, many New Yorkers have followed Pale Male's mating, nesting, chick-raising, eviction and welcome back. An entire industry of videos, screen savers, daily Web site updates, etc. have been developed depicting the behavior of Pale Male and Lola.

Gee, all we have to do is step out into our own neighbor-

hoods and a cornucopia of bird wildlife awaits us. And to help us identify the birds in our back yards, Pearson told me about an ASU Web site that depicts birds and their songs: <http://askabiologist.asu.edu/>.

From the Ask a Biologist Web site, under Experiments and Stuff, navigate to Birds and their Songs. ASU in cooperation with Audubon Arizona has cataloged 180 species of birds common to our area with pictures, range maps, sound files and sonograms of the bird recordings.

Pearson started watching birds when he was a teenager. He believes that most of us don't realize the wealth of birds in our own neighborhoods.

"Even in the middle of Tempe, if you plant the right things, control predators and the use of pesticides, we can have a tremendous variety of birds in our back yards," says Pearson.

Human beings have had a lot of bad impact on birds, but we can offset it by doing good things that will ultimately enhance our environment. What birds live in your 'hood? Go check it out.

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