

We can learn a lot from birds...

Wouldn't you know it? When the Bastrop Audubon crew doing the local CBC (Christmas Bird Count) on New Year's Day showed up at the Biology Station I was in the midst of filling the feeders.

I knew they would be coming by at some time during the day so thought I'd better get the feeders full early, but it's hard to beat an early-rising birder to the punch. Needless to say, while I was filling the feeders there was little of anything to be seen.

I suggested that they continue on their route and come back in a half hour or so when the big bird disturber (me) had vamoosed and left the birds to their breakfast. The birds came back but I'm not sure if the survey crew did. I spent most of the rest of the day in the greenhouse (spring cleaning comes early in the greenhouse) and I probably would've seen or heard them if they had.

So I was intrigued by the short early CBC report in *Bird Calls*, the Bastrop County Audubon Society's newsletter that mentioned a "strange scarcity of doves of any of our four varieties" but made no mention of the obvious—to me at least—dearth of Pine



An extended family of Inca Doves, Columbina inca, forages en masse—a family that forages together stays together.

Siskins. Doves are daily visitors to our feeders, including a family of five Inca Doves and a pair of Mourning Doves, and they were front and center for most of New Year's Day.

Our other common yard and feeder birds, all of which visited us on the first day of the year, are the usual Cardinals, Titmice and Chickadees but also includes Wrens, three species of Wood-

peckers (it's always a thrill when the Pileated's stop by), White-Eyed Vireos, Blue Jays and a couple of pairs of Pine Warblers. One difference this year is that we've been able to watch a dozen or so American Goldfinches feeding at the thistle-seed socks. We generally only have one or two Goldfinches because they're often displaced by the more aggressive Siskins!

Admittedly, it's being a really strange winter all over. Our relatives in Canada complained of a green Christmas and the sailboats out on the lake that should have ice-fishing huts on it. But then, that's why the CBC is so important—it documents the effect that climate perturbations have on the fauna rather than just taking measurements.

So, when the usual winter birds are absent it tells us something about what's going on wherever the birds come from. The north-east has been unseasonably warm so many birds may not have come far enough south to visit us (yet!) while the northwest has been cold, wet and snowy and their birds may have overshot us to get someplace warm.

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