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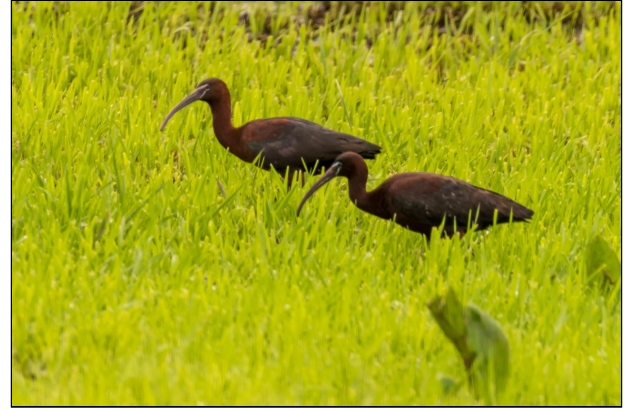


An occsional Cedar Waxwing or two show up in our yard up north in the summer, but not large flocks

ONE FINE WEEK

Watching birds at home, whether in Florida or in Pennsylvania, we often go months, even whole seasons, without a single significant sighting of any unusual birds.

From our winter condo home in Florida, prohibited by Condo Association rules from setting up any bird feeders, we are limited to the few birds that wander by our back yard and the small lake behind our unit. Palm Warblers in the shrubbery; Sandhill Cranes ambling by daily; Red-bellied Woodpeckers in the palm trees; Mockingbirds nesting next door; Little Blue Herons searching for geckos just outside our windows; Double-crested Cormorants fishing in the lake; thousands of Common Grackles overhead, going to and from their roost at dusk and dawn daily; Purple Martins after their return in January, Swallow-tailed Kites after their return in March; and Limpkins foraging around the edge of the lake.



On our Pennsylvania farm in the summer, we are more fortunate, in that we have more varied habitat and are able to maintain several feeding stations. After our mid-April migration back north, lingering winter birds such as White-throated and Fox Sparrows, Northern juncos, Purple Finches and Pine Siskins have joined the year round Blue Jays, Mockingbirds, Song Sparrows, House Finches, Carolina Wrens, Goldfinches, Eastern Bluebirds, Carolina Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, Red-bellied, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Flickers, and Tufted Titmouse, all taking advantage of our feeders, which our son and grandson maintain for us all winter.



By the time we return north, the Tree Swallows, Red-winged Blackbirds, Purple Martins, and Common Grackles have already arrived, followed shortly thereafter by the Barn Swallows, Gray Catbirds, Brown Thrashers, Towhees, Baltimore Orioles, House Wrens, Chipping Sparrows, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Eastern Kingbirds, Killdeer, a Kestrel pair in our provided nest box, Wood Thrushes and Red-tailed Hawks nesting in the adjacent woods, and Canada Geese, Mallards, Green Heron, and fishing Osprey on our farm pond. Distressingly, a pair of Coopers Hawks constantly visits our Purple Martin racks looking for an unwary Martin meal. As all these species are present daily, we tend to take them for granted.

This summer, during one fine week, these norms were shattered. First, our son, after a weekend visit, called to tell us as he was leaving on Sunday evening, that he was pretty sure that he saw a pair of Glossy Ibis (*above, left and right*) in the marshy area below our farm

pond. He asked, "Is that possible?"

We assured him that it was not. While Glossy Ibis can be found regularly at the New Jersey and Delaware coastal birding hot spots, they very rarely wander as far inland as our Pennsylvania location. Nevertheless, we hurried down to double check and found only a pair of Mallards there. When we called to tell him, he responded, "The Ibis were right next to the Mallards." The next morning, Monday, there they were, right where he said they were. The Mallards were gone, but the Ibis pair lingered for the rest of the day.

Two days later, walking by our large Shadbush plant (also called Service Berry), I noticed a tremendous amount of bird activity going on. A flock, perhaps 40 or 50, of Cedar Waxwings were gorging themselves on the ripening berries. Now, we do occasionally see Cedar Waxwings (*right*) on the farm, one or two at a time, generally in the Cedar trees, or small groups flying overhead, but never in such large numbers as on this occasion. They spent the whole day there and a few returned the next day until they cleaned off all the berries on the tree. Then they were gone.

Rounding out the fine week a day later, we looked out the kitchen window to discover a Pileated Woodpecker feasting on our suet block feeder. Long time readers of this column are aware that a large variety of birds love the suet feeders. (See: stlucieaudubon.org/hartBeat/hb2014/hb141201rules.html and stlucieaudubon.org/hartBeat/hb2016/hb160715rules.html)

But this is the first time we have ever seen a Pileated Woodpecker there. In fact, we have only seen Pileated Woodpeckers on our property a few times over all the years, apparently birds that were just passing through. This female Pileated (*left*) feasted on the suet for two days and then was gone. But she certainly seemed to savor the suet as her long tongue dangles a blob before taking it down. Then too, she could be the poster girl for, "I learned to share in kindergarten." (*below, with Grackle*)





Many birders travel long distances to find unusual birds, or birds that can't be found in their backyards. One rare or unusual bird a season, at home, is pretty exciting, but three in one week is truly remarkable. Finding one good bird a season at home qualifies as "One Fine Day" (here sung by Carole King: www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJFTVKOQKQA); but three, at home, whether in Florida or Pennsylvania, in one week, qualifies as a week even more worthy of a song: "One Fine Week."

Any budding song writers out there?

