

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

FEATURE MATERIAL

For Release On Receipt (prepared 2/27/74)

McGarvey 202/343-5634

## BIRD WATCHING FOR CITY FOLK

It'll brighten your morning rush to the subway, enliven the carpool commute, even spark a stroll through city parks for many readers. Call it the "Non-Birdwatcher's Handbook" and you're on target. Fifty Birds of Town and City, published by Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, is geared to the city dweller who knows little or nothing about birds.

It doesn't read like a biology textbook. It was edited not only to inform and educate readers, but also to entertain them, even coax a few into the satisfying hobby of birdwatching. The 50 watercolor portraits alone are worth your time.

The changes in the bird world wrought by city and suburb are portrayed vividly. For example, the reader discovers that because modern barns are so tightly constructed, barn swallows can't gain entrance to place their mud-basket-nests among rafters. And, so, they've turned to boat docks, summer homes, and farm out-buildings to keep the species going. Canada geese have set down in flocks on city squares and shopping centers, mistaking a pool of light for a pool of water.

Bird names intrigue most of us. The white-breasted nuthatch gets its name in part from its habit of wedging nuts in crevices of bark and breaking them open with its strong, sharp bill. The killdeer is distinguished by piercing and oft repeated cries of "kill-dee," and the catbird has a fine song, frequently broken by mewling like a cat when alarmed.

There are outrageous dudes in the city bird world, akin, perhaps, to some human stalkers of the sidewalks. Whether you admire or dislike the blue jay, backyards are enlivened by this arrogant hustler. Cautious and silent in the vicinity of its nest, it is bold and noisy away from it.

The ruby-throated hummingbird, the size of your thumb, is described as being incredibly pugnacious for so tiny a creature, taking on cats, weasels, even, mind you, eagles.

The visual impression birds create enlivens the entire text. The Baltimore oriole's fiery orange and black is easy to spot, and adds a flick of glory to the urban scene. A flock of chimney swifts flowing funnel-like into a chimney is a startling evening experience.

The book discusses bird sounds. The brown thrasher's note sounds like the smacking of lips. The tufted titmouse, a sparrow-sized active mite, is often heard before it can be seen. Its spring call of "peter, peter, peter" is audible at some distance.

Bird nests vary in size and shape. The Baltimore oriole is the architect of the pendulous nests seen only after the leaves have fallen. Cowbirds, we are told, are the only native American species to lay their eggs in the nests of other species where the young are raised by foster parents.

The city resident is told how to attract and keep various species. Raisins, apples, or oranges will bring mockingbirds to a feeding station. Ruby-throated hummingbirds sup on nectar from garden flowers and can be attracted to your yard by tubes of sugar water properly hung. \*A supply of suet, hung out of reach of cats and dogs, will make the black-capped chickadee a regular feeder in your yard.

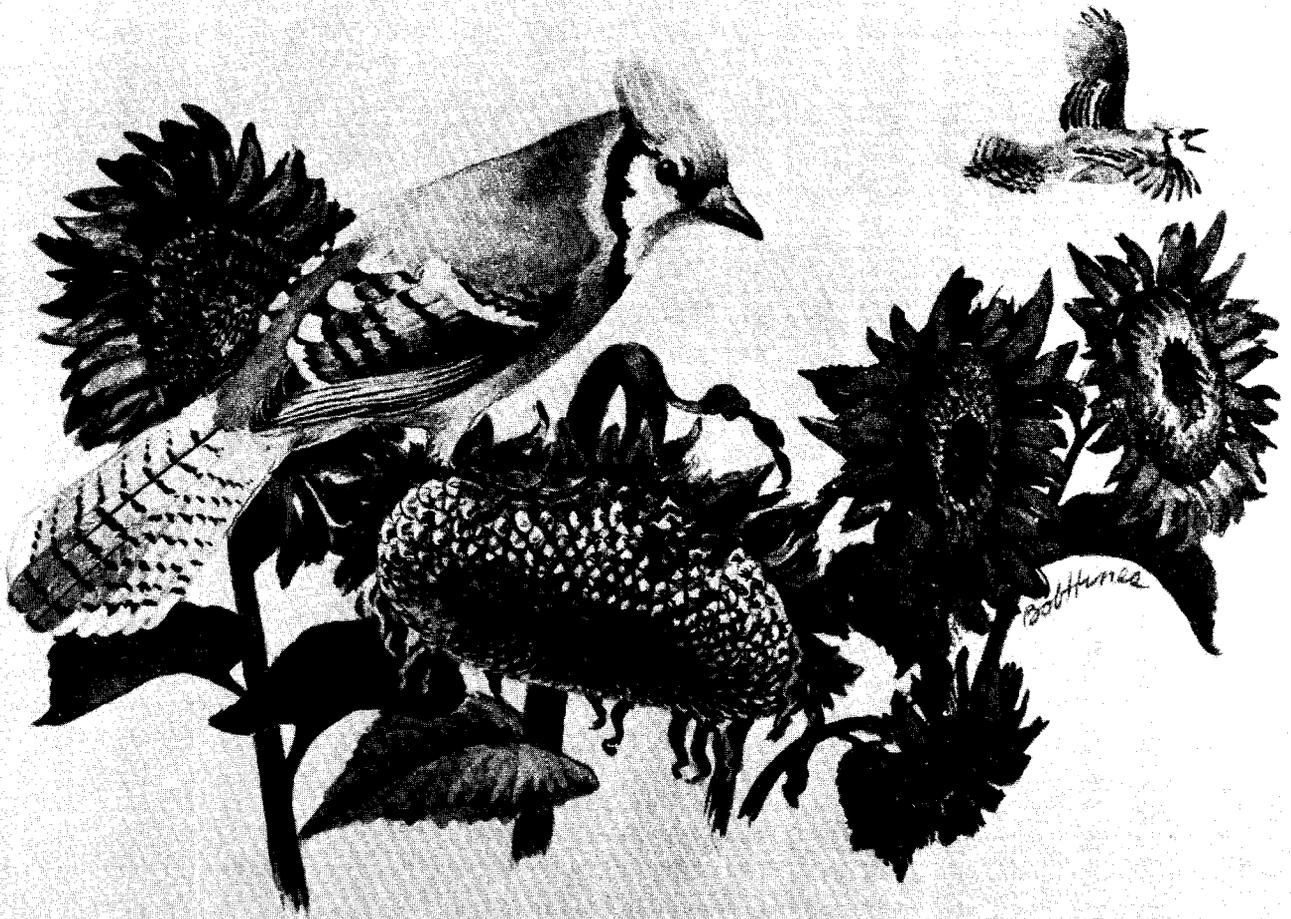
A surprising inclusion to the city list is the turkey vulture, carrion eater and natural scavenger, attracted to urban areas by road kills and garbage.

Publications such as this are not new with the Fish and Wildlife Service. The current volume updates with suitable changes a 1913 publication entitled Fifty Common Birds of Farm and Orchard. Two factors prompted a complete revision of the work.

The most obvious is that farms and orchards have been replaced by towns and cities. This has had a profound effect on the habits of many common birds--and of many people who have "migrated" from farm to city.

Secondly, the 1913 volume contained 50 color portraits of birds by famed wildlife artist Louis Agassiz Fuertes. Because the color had faded beyond the eye of the reproduction camera, the paintings were redone by Bob Hines, Fish and Wildlife Service artist, who picked up the fallen Fuertes brush.

Fifty Birds of Town and City is available from the Government Printing Office at \$4 hardback and \$1.05 paperback. Orders should be mailed to Manager, Public Documents Distribution Center, 5801 Tabor Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19120.



The blue jay, one of 50 watercolor portraits in the Fish and Wildlife Service's book.