

BIRDWATCHING IS FASCINATING  
FROM THE BACKYARD

Second Thoughts

By J. B. Leftwich, Columnist

The Lebanon Democrat,

20 May 1992

Tyrone and LaTaya, our bluebirds, are peace loving birds who mind their own business, guard with diligence their home in our back yard and try to be neighborly.

The neighborly trait led to a major confrontation.

For some unknown reason, Tyrone and LaTaya decided to practice their good neighbor policy with Charlie and his mate, our purple martins. Perhaps I should qualify the use of the word "our." Actually, they are not our martins; we are their persons.

Well, anyway, Tyrone and LaTaya flew from their box at a lower level and lit on the perch of the martin box at a higher level. They didn't intrude or enter the domicile of the martins. They just sat there enjoying the pleasant spring weather.

I should mention that Charlie and mate were not at home at the time. They were out foraging for building materials since they were in the midst of rearranging their bedrooms in anticipation of the arrival of triplets.

Tyrone and LaTaya had just settled on the martins' perch when Charlie and mate returned with mouths full of bedroom furniture and spied the bluebirds basking in forbidden territory.

You would have thought the Iraqis had just invaded Wilson County. The martins immediately took offense, zeroing on poor Tyrone who decided discretion was the better part of valor and took off for the wild blue yonder with the martins in hot pursuit and making more noise than a jet taking off the new Lebanon airport runway.

LaTaya kept her perch, watching the entire air battle as if she hadn't a worry in the world until she tired of the spectacle and retired to her own box. A chastised Tyrone returned home later.

Although the martins were irate with poor old Tyrone, they tolerated with good grace the invasion of a couple of sparrows. In fact, the sparrows were threatening to oust the martins until Junior Moss arrived.

Junior is our resident authority on martins. Without him the sparrows probably would be the sole proprietors of our martin box. According to Junior, the sparrows invade the martins' nest, break their eggs or roll them out of the box, and then proceed to raise their own broods.

Junior arrived with a sparrow trap, a wire cage with three compartments including a middle section where three sparrows were confined. He placed the trap on the ground under the martin box. The noise of the captive sparrows, was expected to tempt the unwelcome martin box sparrows to inspect the cage and thus spring the trap.

The sparrows did not budge, but a mockingbird entrapped himself.

Not to worry. Junior released the mockingbird and went home for inserts which he placed in the martin box and trapped the offending sparrows.

Tyrone and LaTaya, needless to say, have kept their distance since their experience. They are part of a continuing drama that unfolds in our back yard. We watch with fascination the many species of birds that come to our feeders or feed in our yard. Just off the top of our heads, we named 20 different species not including the ones previously mentioned or the unpopular varieties such as the starlings and cowbirds.

As for Junior, he catches a lot of sparrows during a given summer. And what happens to the sparrows he traps?

We were afraid to ask.

\*Since writing this column, the bluebird family has vacated the box. A stray cat waited beneath the box for one to falter, and actually one baby bird's flying skills were so poor that we had to lift it from the ground into a tree. But we thwarted the cat.

Like, man, I don't write the headlines for my columns such as the one last week.

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