



howard county
BIRD CLUB
50th ANNIVERSARY • 1972 – 2022

MEMBERS' MEMORIES

Eva Sunell

Joining the Howard County Bird Club in 1978, I was introduced to one birder who encouraged us not just to count and identify birds but to try and get into the soul of the bird. Not to make them human but to realize we are related to all life on earth.

The most amazing bird action I ever witnessed was right next door in a tall oak tree about 35 years ago.

Hearing many crows assembling in the tree, I got my binoculars and stood on my back stoop to look for the hawk or owl that was creating this fuss. It was a Red-shouldered Hawk. Around it there were 150-200 crows standing all over that oak tree cawing and cawing in a raucous rage at the hawk. "Too many for just a casual attack on a bird of prey—and more crows are flying in," I thought.

O.K., binoculars up again and let's take a look at our Red-shouldered Hawk which appears to be picking at something between its claws. "REALLY! WHAT ON EARTH!?!?" I could not believe it, but between his claws was a flattened crow carcass, stiff, and thin like a cardboard cutout. Where did that hawk find such a thing? Every two minutes or so, it flipped that dried carcass up into the air, which only caused more alarmed chatter from the gathered crows. I cannot think like that hawk, but its intentions seemed to be to tease the crows mercilessly with a deceased body of one of their own. Was this the hawk's entertainment for the day? Where in that "bird brain" did such an act emerge?

Another bird memory from many years ago concerns my work as a bird rehabilitator. "Charlie" was a starling who was brought to me the end of May. Barely feathered, he was all gangling legs and squawking mouth. I received "Robin" the same day. Because they were about the same age, they shared a box and were fed at the same time. Although a rivalry existed between the two, it was apparent that Charlie was the more aggressive.

Within a week the birds were placed in an outdoor enclosure. Charlie was the first to "fly the cage." When he left, I did not expect him to return, but when I went out to feed Robin and called for Charlie, he came back, squawking as usual. Sometimes Robin refused food. Charlie seemed to sense this for he would then fly into the cage and push at Robin. With that, the robin would come alive and eat.

Three days after the starling's release, it was Robin's turn to leave. He left the cage and followed the starling as though Charlie were his mother. Chirping loudly, Robin would snuggle close to Charlie until the starling had to peck at the robin to get it to leave.

I continued feedings. Charlie always came back when called, landing in the backyard dogwood. Not so with Robin. Many times Charlie had to return to encourage the robin to eat. First, he would locate Robin. Then by nudges and squawks he would move him off of his perch. Like a feathered sheepdog, Charlie worked Robin over to the dogwood. Poor Charlie had to stay until feeding time was over, for if he left prematurely, he had to repeat the performance.

As time passed, Robin adopted some bird parents and appeared content. And, eventually, Charlie started feeding himself—but always in the company of *robins*.

About one month after leaving the cage, Charlie returned to my dogwood for the last time. There he proudly produced his first adult sound—that of a chirping robin! I like to think that, in his own way, he was bidding me good-bye.

Because Eva Sunell had the necessary permits from the federal government she could care for injured and orphaned songbirds.