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“That’s for the Birds!”

After more than half a century of working, I joyfully retired in Summer of 2007 with a list of greatly anticipated activities in mind, including golfing. Birdwatching was *not* on my list. *That* activity evoked an image of a bearded, bespectacled, introverted geeky chap who excitedly spotted and checked off bird species from his birdwatcher’s guide book (a Great-tailed Grackle, for example).

Then one balmy sunny afternoon whilst gazing out my patio door I noticed some unusual (I thought) birds in my backyard. Had I been too busy during my work years to notice these creatures or were they new visitors? While relaxing in my easy chair, it seemed to me I could easily observe their comings and goings. I liked the idea. Then it dawned on me: *I’m* a bearded, bespectacled, introverted geeky chap! So I went to Wild Birds Unlimited where I bought birdseed, bird feeders, bird treats and, of course, the *Birds of New Mexico Field Guide*.

You have probable guessed by now, dear reader, this article is *not* about the idiom in the title above. That expression means, by the way, “worthless” or “no good.”

So, I began to watch my backyard visitors *and record* any unusual birds I spotted. I did indeed see a Great-tailed Grackle! And more: several kinds of Woodpeckers and Grosbeaks, a Red Crossbill, a Scott’s Oriole, a Dark-eyed Junco, three kinds of hawks (presumably seeking to make a meal of one of my other visitors), and many more. Well, you get the idea.

There’s more to this story. I also had squirrel visitors and (rarely) chipmunks. So I installed two squirrel feeders on my wooden back fence and built a little ladder to them, not that squirrels *needed* the ladder, it turns

out, but they did use it from time to time. I kept the feeders stocked with peanuts in the shell. Some squirrels took up residence under my backyard shed, so I hung “Squirrel Hotel” signs over the entrances they dug.

Soon there were baby squirrels scampering cautiously about the yard. The squirrels and birds coexisted peacefully. My backyard is shaded by the leafy canopy provided by two huge Fruitless Mulberry trees, so hawks couldn’t easily swoop in and carry off diners at Café Aves. All was well. For a while.

Did I mention the Mourning Doves? Well, there were (and are) *plenty* of them around. But they got along with my other visitors, so I didn’t mind them. And, for while, there was only an occasional pigeon. For a while.

My next door neighbor has a backyard that is quite open and has power and phone lines running across the rear of his property. He fed pigeons. They would wait in rows on the overhead lines as he supplied his flat feeding stations with grain and then they would descend *en masse* to feast. That is, until the people living behind him complained about the pigeons befouling their patio and back yard. So my obliging neighbor *stopped* feeding pigeons.

Now, pigeons are not the brightest of the bird family and it took them a while to discover my Café Aves. But when they *did* find it, they came in *big* flocks. They couldn’t eat from the feeders for the smaller birds but the foraged for seed that dropped to the ground.

And they methodically tossed the peanuts from the squirrel feeders onto the ground. They couldn’t open the nuts but they kept poking and tossing them until they were all on the ground. They crowded out the exotic migratory birds and most of the smaller bird species. And they greatly polluted the yard.

Alas, I never found a suitable way to rid my backyard of these tiresome dim-witted bullies and at the same time be able to welcome more desirable guests, so I closed down Café Aves and the Squirrel Hotel. At the risk of revealing my avifauna prejudice, let me say *pigeons are for the birds!*

