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# Our Backyard Watering Hole

by: Kiki Young (as told to Diane Vaszily)

HARDLY A DAY GOES BY WITHOUT SOME SORT OF PERFORMANCE

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Watering hole visitors (clockwise, from top left): Coyote, Harris' Antelope Ground Squirrel, Gambel's Quail, Cottontail Rabbit; Javelina/Collared Peccary, Greater Roadrunner  
[photos courtesy Wikipedia]

Sitting on a little hill in the shadow of Continental Mountain, we are continuously entertained with the antics of the local fauna. Deer, javelina, quail, rabbits, coyotes, ground squirrels and an assortment of reptiles repeatedly perform before us as we hunker down to spy upon them from behind closed doors and windows. Hardly a day goes by without some sort of a performance. The main attraction is an old oil pan, converted to a mini-lake, which serves as the local “watering hole.” The Cave Creek “natives” stop by on their way to and from their daily forays. They come at dawn, dusk or when a cooler wind blows...in pairs, coveys, packs, mobs and as solitary visitors.

The javelina not only visit the watering hole but have come knocking on the glass door (using their noses) in an attempt to either get inside or get our attention! Whether attracted by their own reflection or an empty watering dish I guess we will never know.



Quail wander in by the covey...Mom, Dad, and long streams of incredibly tiny walking “fluff balls.” Dad stands sentinel on a nearby rock while Mom fusses over the black cottony mass entering the water. After a loud warning scream from Dad, all but one scamper out of the dish and into the surrounding brush. The floundering one (maybe drowning is a better word) finally responds to Mom’s pleadings and flops up and over the sides! Not to be deterred, they return daily, but with their ranks thinned.

We have a covering of indoor-outdoor carpeting on the back patio which is close to the “watering hole.” This material has attracted the suspicions and curiosity of more than one set of creatures. The deer, along with several of their young, are sure it is browse and make every attempt to eat it...again and again! The Harris’ antelope ground squirrels find it to be an amusing hideout (or so it appears) when the wind blows little tents in it. Their busy scurryings back and forth, over and under the carpeting, give the appearance of children playing.

Roadrunners stop by as part of their daily routine (or so it seems), often with their young. On one occasion Mom appears to have stopped by the “spa” for a beauty treatment while the kids play in the nursery (the surrounding yard). She spends long moments fluffing and preening feathers while the ungainly young stand by wondering what to get into next. As you might guess all this inattentive wildlife begins to attract another type of creature...the predator. The hawks patrol now almost hourly in the hope they might be faster than the playful ones below. Coyotes have apparently heard the news as well for they march along the south bank, just below the “watering hole” as if they too are on patrol.

Each day this summer seems to bring more and more activity at our watering hole as if word has traveled through the animal kingdom...but then maybe it has! Now that I think about it, every morning about 6 a.m. a persistent gila woodpecker “attacks” our chimney with wild and reckless beatings causing a resounding echo throughout the immediate desert. Perhaps it isn’t a mistake at all on his part; maybe he was sent to deliver the message and to send the word throughout the desert...the “watering hole” is open once again!

