

Feeder riddle solved when hairy woodpecker is spotted

By ART BRIGGS-JUDE
Correspondent

We should have guessed there was something unusual going on when the syrup in our hummingbird feeders began to disappear at a faster rate than normal.

Even the recent appearance of many additional young birds did not seem to justify this increased usage. While we were wrestling with this dilemma, another loss involving the hummingbird dispenser itself occurred.

While over the years our hummingbird feeders grew in numbers (three) to take care of the increasing hummingbird population, it was last summer's wasp plague that caused us to change the design.

The model we now use has the capacity to hold two cups of sugar/water solution and four dispensing stations complete with perches.

It is these small imitation flowers with their central feeding hole that seems to discourage the hordes of hornets that plagued the previous units. When several of these yellow plastic florets went missing, it posed an even bigger mystery than the increased syrup consumption.

Our first thought was that they had dropped out during one of the filling-up routines, especially when the missing pieces were located below the feeder. Pressing them back into place proved



Photo/ART BRIGGS-JUDE

This hairy woodpecker was caught in the act of helping itself to a sweet treat in a feeder offered to smaller birds.

to be such a snap fit it seemed likely that more than a hummingbird's strength would be required to remove them.

Was it a squirrel, tight-rope across the balcony that pawed the little fake flowers out in our absence? If so, it had to be a nocturnal flying squirrel, because no blacks, greys or reds had been seen near the house lately.

Maybe it was a prowling raccoon that tip-toed along the balcony under cover of darkness

and fingered out the plastic petals. Raccoons do like the sweet hummingbird feeder mix as one of our friends on Crosby Lake found out last year.

During repeated visits to their hummingbird feeder, this black-masked bandit would reach out from a nearby tree limb and tip the container to drink the sweet juice.

Alas, like a lot of gamblers, this furry individual decided to go for the whole pot and ended up on the ground one night surrounded by all its shattered sweet dreams.

Despite the increase in the syrup consumption and the continued removal of the small yellow flowers, the cause for these happenings at our place remained a riddle. We were nearing a full week of not solving the puzzle when, during a mid-morning coffee break, we caught the culprit bellying up to the sweet bar.

Can you imagine our surprise when a hairy woodpecker alighted on the pedestal below the hummingbird feeder and proceeded to gobble up the tiny safari of ants that were moving along there.

Those ants must have left a bitter taste in the woodpecker's mouth because the next instant it had climbed to the feeder itself and was busy sucking up the sweet liquid.

The little floret, however, was designed for the small tongue of the hummingbird and the woodpecker was experiencing some difficulty in getting enough volume to supply its wants. Being a driller and a pecker by profession, it didn't take the woodpecker long to thrust the tip of its sharp bill into the tiny hole and extract the plastic flower. With this restrainer out of the way, the larger bird could then get a king-sized drink.

While operating hummingbird feeders over the years, we've had, on occasion, an oriole sample our offerings and have had several reports this year of house finches visiting them. But this woodpecker has more than a sweet tooth and by its antics seems to be living up to its name. No wonder they call it the hairy woodpecker.

1990 Strawberry Festival plans begin

A new executive has been elected to carry on the Strawberry Festival tradition.

New members chosen to head up plans for the 1990 festival are Pat Ratcliffe and Jim Heidema as co-chairs, Gary Fisher as Past Chairman; Jim Kidd as fundraiser and Marlane Mckee Wetherall as town liaison.

The final wrap-up of the 1989 festival and commencement of planning for the 1990 event was held last week in Stouffville.

Mrs. Ratcliffe has been on the committee for five years and has served as its secretary during that time. She will co-chair with Mr. Heidema in 1990 and will take over as chairman in 1991 and 1992.

She and her husband, Terry, have two children; Adam, 8, and Tiffany, 5.

Jim Heidema has also been on the committee for five years serving in various capacities including public relations, chairman and past chairman.

Jim and his wife, Bonnie, have two children; Paul, 12, and Christopher, 9.

The committee is scheduled to meet for its next planning session on Monday, Oct. 2 at 7:30 p.m. in the boardroom at the Recreation Centre.



They do!

Wendi and Allan Bacon were married Aug. 11 at the First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Wendi is the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Fraser of Dartmouth and Allan is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Bacon of Stouffville. Wendi is on staff of the Royal Bank, Kitchener, and Allan is on the teaching staff of Waterloo Collegiate.

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