

Songbirds won't sing my tunes

Where have all my birds gone?

Despite the fact I have two feeders, one for small varieties and another for large. Despite the fact I keep said feeders filled morning, noon and night; despite the fact I fill these feeders with only the best of seed, feathered friends, of which I once had hundreds, have mysteriously disappeared.



Roaming Around
with Jim Thomas

I'm frustrated. "Your cardinals and blue jays will be happy," Sue Gow of Stouffville's Pet Valu tells me every time I load up her counter with bags of tasty bird bits.

"I wish," is my reply, knowing full well 90 per cent of what I buy will be gobbled up by squirrels.

Not that I dislike these bushy-tailed rodents. With them, I'm equally generous, mainly because they're all I have left, save for countless grackles, starlings and sparrows. No shortage of them.

But that's not my purpose. It's the coloured songsters to whom I wave the welcome mat.

I'm discouraged, to the point of discontinuing summer feedings.

Many folks do, satisfied Mother Nature makes a multitude of food sources available without breaking the bank.

Still, there must be reasons, things I'm not doing right. I've been checking bird books, hoping at least one veteran naturalist can come up with some answers.

So far, no success there, either.

Birds & Blooms, a magazine to which I subscribe, is my birder bible. I trust it sincerely, continually testing its suggestions.

Again, no luck. This periodical, filled with amazing photos, displays birds of every description vying for priority positions on back yard feeders. But not on mine.

However, when it comes to being upstaged, references aren't required from a publication out of Greendale, Wisc. I need look no further than a neighbour two doors up the street.

At any given time, morning, noon or night, her silo-shaped receptacle is inundated by black and yellow plumage. Goldfinch cling to every perch with more waiting in line.

At mine, the same feeder style and the same feeder seed, nothing. Or almost nothing.

I'm about to give up. Me, being the familiar type of sanctimonious male, tends to blame someone or something other than myself. And this I do. Or did. I continually pointed accusing fingers, (or a poorly aimed shoe), at a number of roving cats trespassing on our property.

One of these, a tiger-striped feline with eyes that glow in the dark, continually lies in wait, often for hours, hoping a mourning dove or some such plump specimen will land close by.

But birds, at least my birds, are far too smart. They give Miss Puss a wide berth.

So therein, perhaps, lies the problem. Birds are too afraid to come. Hence, nothing comes.

Yes, we, too, have a cat. However, 13-year-old Indy wouldn't move in a menacing manner if a house finch sat on its nose.

As improbable as this may be, there's also a possibility my feeding schedule isn't in keeping with most birds' feeding habits.

In an effort to attract blue jays and cardinals, I place peanuts, dressed and undressed, in the largest tray every morning and evening.

I feel my feathered friends will be hungriest following a good night's sleep and again before going to bed.

The rest of the time, for economic reasons, I provide mostly sunflower seed. They can eat it or bury it, I don't care. The choice is theirs.

But they won't bite. My generosity goes unappreciated.

Such wasn't always the case.

On our arrival here, 48 years ago, birds of every breed inundated the block. I purchased seed, not by small bags but by big bushels in an effort to attract a fair share. And I did.

For seemingly hours, I'd stand, binoculars in hand, watching the comings and goings of back yard guests. It was amazing; a sight I now miss.

My wife says bird fancier numbers have increased dramatically since we first set foot in Stouffville. And she's right. While delivering the Sun-Tribune over an eight-mile area, I spot feeders everywhere. And not only during winter, but year-round.

The practice, it seems, has become so popular, supply exceeds the demand.

The bird should feel fortunate.

I don't.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.

RED OR GREEN GRAPES

These are from California and pretty much at their peak of the season in eating quality. We try to pick the larger size fruit — and as freshly picked as possible. You can tell this by the amount of green in the stem. If it's a withered and dry stem, we leave it for those guys looking for 'deals' at the produce market.

From California

1.99
LB

CHORIZO!

We'll be making lots and lots of these sausages this week. They are not for the faint of heart but for those who want adventure in their bun; they will spark up just about any bun or dish that you care to use them in.

Reg. \$3.99 lb.

25%
OFF THIS WEEK

MANGOES

We've got some nice size '7' Kent mangoes for this week. Size '7' is big — but you'll have to be patient as these ripen.

From Mexico

99¢
EACH

WHAT'S FOR DINNER!

Our frozen entree feature this week will be our Hawaiian Chicken. It's made with cubes of poached breast meat, pineapple, sweet peppers, all in a sweet and sour type sauce. It comes to you fully cooked, all you need to do is warm it.

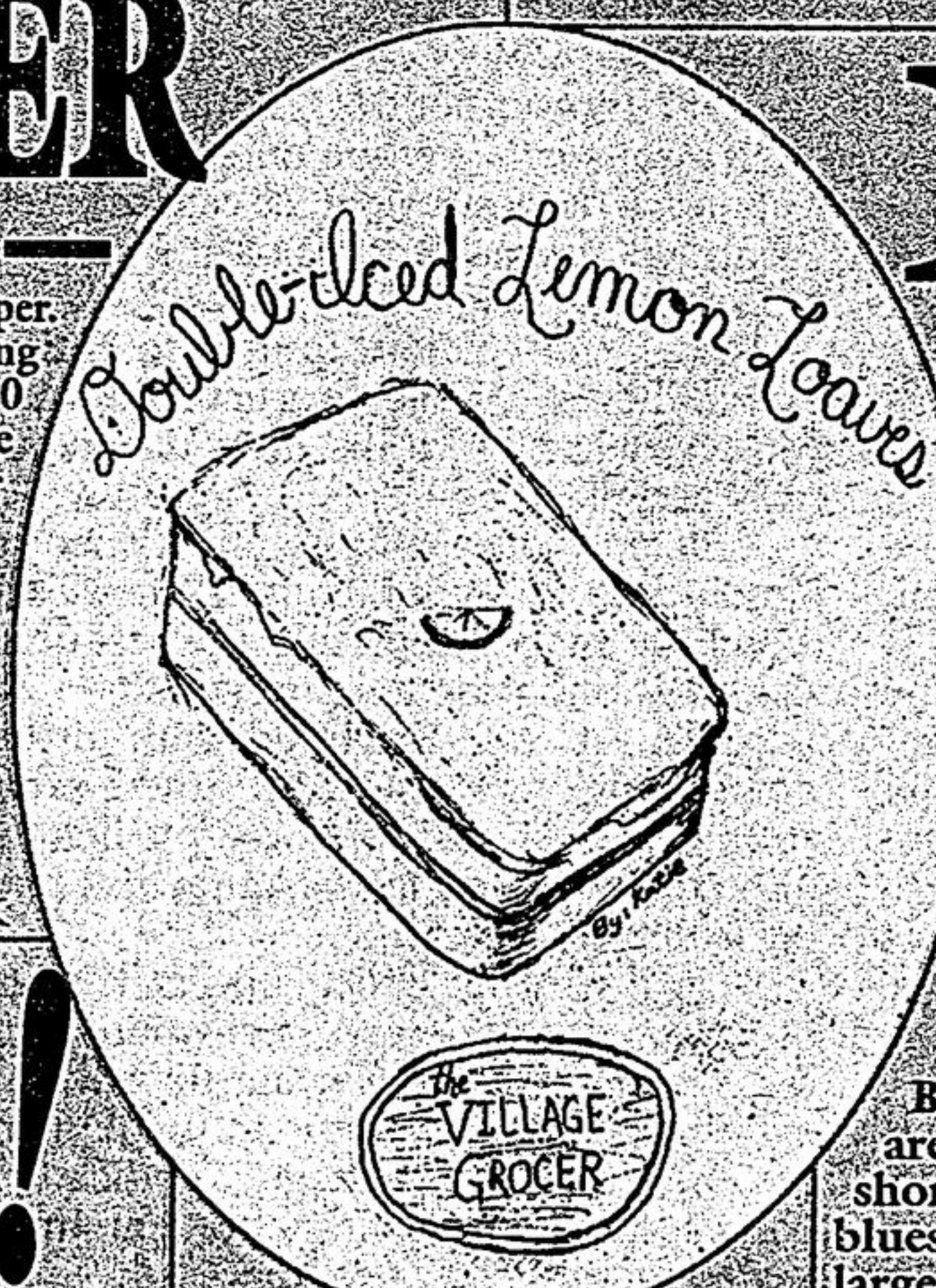
Serves 3-4
Reg. \$14.95

25%
OFF THIS WEEK

HAWAIIAN SNAPPER FILLETS

This fish is actually called 'Lahi' Snapper. It's more of a depth dweller, inhabiting rocky outcrops at a depth of 300-400 fathoms (2000 feet) because that's where their food of smaller shrimp and fish dwell. These are beautifully coloured fish producing a delicate moist fillet that melts in your mouth. The fillets range in colour from white to pink.

14.95
LB
THIS WEEK



WHAT'S BAKING THIS WEEK!

Our flavour in the bakery this week is Blueberry. What we'll be baking is

BLUEBERRY-RASPBERRY PIES — these are the traditional 9" size — not the mega pies that we make. We use wild blues and fresh raspberries to make them.
Two sizes **\$4.95 & \$10.95**

BLUEBERRY TURNOVERS — made with our puff pastry. **\$2.99** ea.
Reg.

BLUEBERRY SHORTCAKES — these are the cousin of our strawberry shortcakes, except that we use wild blues instead. The smaller version is large enough to serve 6 and the large will serve 12.
Reg. **\$18.95 & \$28.95**

BLUEBERRY-DATE MUFFINS — these are made with flaxseed as well. **\$1.59** ea.
Reg.

— AND LASTLY —

We will be making Some of my fave **DOUBLE-ICED LEMON LOAVES** — when I take these home, I need more than one unless I know for certain that my kids are at camp. It's best served at room temp when the icing is the perfect texture.

Reg. **\$5.99** ea.

All these items will be on sale at **25%**
OFF THIS WEEK

WHAT'S COOKIN! AT THE DELI

The first item we'll be making is Cathy's summer salad. We have this salad at home often, but to my mind, not often enough. She boils cobs of our corn and then cuts the kernels off in swaths, de-seeds and then dices local tomatoes and sweet onions, and then seasons it with some light oil and rice vinegar. Add some chopped fresh basil and oregano, and voila! It's great either at room temperature or chilled. Very light and refreshing.

We'll also be making some de-boned Cornish hens which have been stuffed with an apricot, sage and caramelized onion preparation and then slow-roasted. They will be available warm in the mid-afternoon up 'til dinner time, in the B.B.Q. chicken warmer.

— and, we'll be making a crab chowder with fresh poached mussels, salmon, shrimp and halibut, all finished-up with a hint of brandy and cream. This will be at the deli self-serve cabinet.

SUGAR COOKIES

We'll have some Harry Potter and some Bart Simpson Sugar Cookies this week for all you kids big and small. These are all hand done!

SMOKED TURKEY DRUMSTICKS

I'm sure you've all read up on my story about us selling lots of turkeys throughout the year — in fact even more than all the holiday times put together. The result is large amounts of these beauties which we cure and then slow-smoke. The ultimate result is a big handful of Neanderthal proportions — a dinner or lunch that you won't forget.

We've got lots this week! **99¢**
EACH

WHAT'S HAPPENIN! OUTSIDE!

We'll be receiving a shipment of Purple Fountain grass, both big and small, and some of the mid-Summer square planters to fill in those spots which haven't flourished. It will still be a week or two before Fall mums start with us in earnest.



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