

ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

BACKYARD BIRDS: Yes! Our profuse crop of blue delphiniums in a shady corner of our backyard was the early August morning site of the exciting sighting of a throbbing beating hummingbird. Not often seen in the higher drier parts of Brentwood, it was a true delight to see this tiny creature flitting amongst the blossoming stalks. Nearby, the sparrow brood #2 has flown the coop, and we are about to remove the nesting box.

The common house sparrow is all too common, jeopardizing the native bird population. Unlikely to be eradicated, they can, however, be discouraged as much as possible. Remove nest boxes with holes large enough for them. The Inglewood Bird Sanctuary recommends repairing or replacing them with nest box holes no larger than 1+1/4 inches, thus allowing smaller native species. Mind that house sparrows often peck the hole to be larger. Or try a nest platform for a robin in a sheltered alcove. Now's the time to resolve for next spring, and plan those winter projects.

We had a quandary develop while happily watching the sparrow pair building their first nest and feeding their first brood last May. As our daughter was studying birds at school, she was fascinated by the firsthand view. Simultaneously, we had a Discovery Channel view of the predator blue jay brunching on

eggs and snatching wriggling nestlings for supper. Our now distraught daughter was adamant that we allow the determinedly rebuilding sparrows a second chance. We gave in to the emotion, wondering whether the jays would return in due course for another flyby meal. They didn't, and, now that emotion has passed, reason can prevail.

The jays are the native species, and are only recently making a comeback after a decline in numbers. Do what you can to discourage the house sparrows. University of Calgary biologist Robert Barclay suggests window feeders, as the sparrows can be too chicken to come that close while the chickadees are brave little souls.

Balancing children's emotions and addressing environmental responsibilities will have to be a considered evolution of action. I also muse on human society parallels, or lack thereof, which enhance native human species and let those overpopulated introduced species get into more stressful competition to their own detriment....sociological digressions!

RAIN BARRELS: We've been having great physics fun with our new rain barrels from the WIN shop. We were positively staggered at how fast the 50 gallon drum filled during one of those torrential July downpours. And that was only catching one half of the garage roof! As the first drum was starting to over-

flow, I attached the hose to the tap near the base of the drum and created a siphon into the second drum, which I'd yet to install on a down spout. (This was not as bad as siphoning petrol for an out-of-gas car...) Further amazement followed the rapid filling of the second barrel until their levels were at the same height after the end of the storm.

My concern over these particular barrels is that they need attention to guard against flooding over. There are more expensive barrels on the market, and available to view at the Autonomous Sustainable Home in Scenic Acres, which have an overflow spout, and can easily be adjusted for winter melt water, without creating a 50 gallon block of ice. However, attaching a hose with the tap open can provide directed watering during storms. Raising the barrels on blocks can create the head needed to water most anywhere on your property. And your water bills just may go down!

I am but a motivated novice on rain barrels, so I'd love to receive and share any innovations and insights you've gained with your own barrels. Thanks!

Environmentally yours,

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