

Wild Monday, 25 January 2021, blizzard. By Walt Anderson

I can't wait silently for Wild Wednesday, as this Monday (25 January 2021) is as wild as it gets! Wind is whipping snow into drifts, and visibility is low. There was a nice snow in the Granite Dells yesterday, and when things melted in the afternoon, the creeks began to flow, after being dry for many months. It felt like a miracle. But this blizzard is wild to an extreme!

There can be too much of a good thing, particularly if you are a bird and have already been suffering through a drought that provided a lousy seed crop and few flowers. A few hummingbirds winter here, and we have been challenged in trying to keep our feeders useful to them, as the snow piles up over the nectar holes right after we have opened them for the tiny birds. Seeds scattered on the ground are soon buried too, and the sparrows, juncos, and other seed eaters are frantic.

We are happy for the moisture, but we know this is a time of great stress for most birds and mammals that happen to live above ground and didn't migrate farther south. Some will die or be so stressed that they may fail to successfully breed this year.

Thus this winter storm is a mixed blessing. Climate change models predict higher variability in weather, with more extremes. Months of warm, dry weather tested our patience, and then the snow came all at once.

We are told that we will have to adapt, that we need to create resiliency through more sustainable lifestyles. This means being more prudent with our water supplies here in the drought-prone Southwest. This means protecting our watershed and providing adequate protected areas, like in the Dells, to enhance survival of our valued wildlife. It's why so many of us are trying to save as much as possible of the Granite Dells from development. It's so important to our present and our future.



Heavy snow falling in the Granite Dells. The land is silent, as nearby traffic has nearly ceased, and the snow muffles what sound does remain.



Snow turns a familiar landscape into a fairy world, an ephemeral scene so pleasing to behold.



A blizzard drives the snow horizontally and builds drifts around the lichen-covered rocks, freshly vibrant from the moisture.



Mourning Doves huddle in a pinyon, waiting for the snow and wind to abate a bit so they can seek food hidden beneath its blanket.



A Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay surveys the scene, its brilliant blues like deep glacial ice.



An Oregon Junco lands on the snow that has buried the seeds it needs for daily fuel.



Lesser Goldfinches adorn an oak like Christmas ornaments.



Snowflakes land on an Anna's Hummingbird seeking sweet sustenance at a feeder. We were hard-pressed at times to keep the feeders from being buried in snow.



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Though the snow is a handicap for most critters at the moment, it will release life-giving moisture to recharge the soil (though probably not our ever-declining aquifer being drained by excessive human uses). We need to develop wisdom by understanding how the land works and by thinking ecologically.