

PATCH BIRDING RIVERSIDE PARK

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This pandemic has forced me into birding the same mile of Riverside Park south of 96th Street, just down the block from where I live, almost every day for over two months now. Unable to chase birds throughout the hot spots of New York State this season, the fortunate timing during peak Spring migration at least has provided me with plenty of FOY pleasures. Nevertheless, this routine has shown me that not all nature just passes through affording thrilling chance encounters, but that there is a natural “neighborhood” just outside my door which changes slowly with the seasons. Fortunately, Springtime is when the male birds must stake out a territory and proclaim their constant presence through glorious song in order to attract mates.

It has been my newfound pleasure to recognize the singing 7+ days of individual Towhees, Cardinals, House Finches, and finally the Catbirds in their respective “blocks” (there are just too many House Sparrows, Pigeons, Robins, and Starlings to keep track of). This has been a chance to watch the gradual cessation of White-throated Sparrows, the aggressive courtship of House Sparrows, Robins giving chase, Starlings gathering nest material, and now the constant high-pitched pleas for food from the gaping yellow mouths of awkward fledglings.

I now identify exactly three male Northern Flickers who alert each other with their steady staccato calls of their “turf” across from 82nd, 84th, and 91st Streets. A pair of Downy Woodpeckers whinny in the middle at 86th. I’ve found two of the Flickers clearing out respective tree holes in Hippo Playground and just south of River Run Playground. Last week I saw a female sticking her head out.

Since my first walk I have expected every day the loud “teakettle, teakettle teakettle” of the Carolina Wren just north of Hippo Playground. Last Wednesday I saw the wren on a tree stump by the high stone wall, but heard the song from a few yards away—this must be the female mate. But then came a plaintive peep a few yards in the other direction. Then all three swooped to a scrawny sapling across my path—it was the baby getting fed. Dare I say a tinge of grandparental pride?

Stay safe birding.

[Reproduced here from an email sent to the NYS Birds listserv (NYSBirds-L@cornell.edu) on 26 May 2020, with kind permission from the author.]