

Spring Project 2008

One day early this spring I looked out of the south kitchen window. An ancient lilac bush has been there for all of the 60 years I have lived here and probably many more before. It's about 10 or 12 feet from the window. One morning a major construction project began there. Who the architect or engineer was, I don not know. Possibly the Great Creator himself. I do know who the contractor was for she with her dark feathered body and bright red breast began to diligently erect a nest of mud and dry grass to the strictest specifications. In a few days it was just perfect and passed momma's inspection and hopefully papa's as well. The nest is about 5 feet from the ground. It seemed too near for safety but a few extra feet probably would not make much difference except if it was much higher I would have lost my ringside seat. In a few days I peered in and saw a bright blue egg. Not long after two more followed. Now the robin began the hatching process. It became evident that she was a very devoted mother to be. I thought how tiresome hatching must be. In less days that I would imagine three tiny pink offspring were in the nest. The work began in earnest. Trip after trip was taken in search of a choice worm to feed the little family. The birds were growing. It was about this period in the episode that a long ago memory came to me. Many years ago in the same lilac bush a robin's nest appeared. The course of events was the same as they doubtless have been all through ages. Those birds were good size when I found the mother's feathers beneath the nest where the law of the jungle had prevailed. The birds were hungry so I fed them using tweezers for a day or so when a darker plumaged robin took over the task. The new provider of subsistence was allegedly the father bird. Those birds lived to fly off to the world. I wonder if my present feathered neighbor is a descendent of those long ago.

The present robin family grew very rapidly. I forgot to mention the writer's strange trait as he began talking to an old black cat who roams at will in the area. One morning when this process was taking place the cat walked under the nest. The writer had a heart to heart talk with the cat who immediately ran away thus appearing to agree to leave the young family alone. Several times a day this enterprise was inspected strictly for security purposes. The nest was now overfilled with the three little birds. Mama still sat on the nest but was now raised a great amount. On May 15 one small bird was perched on the edge of the nest surveying the world. I found only one other in the nest. By morning the nest was empty.

One wondered if the old black cat had reneged on its agreement and lunched on the small feathered infants. Lo and behold in the following days I saw some of the fledglings quite openly flying and returning to the sight of their hatching as if to seek the catered lunch they had received from mother bird only a short time before. Could we consider them freeloaders? The spring episode was now ended except for the mess they made on the walk now and then, which all birds seem prone to do.

It is 5:30 in the afternoon of June 6. I just noted another robin hatching another nest about 6 feet from the last. Is it the same robin or another? I think I'll let this one do her thing all on her own, except to say hello when I go by.

October 27, 2008

It is an unusual cold day for this early in the fall. By dark snow began to fall and by bedtime I wondered if it was still snowing. I turned the back yard light on and opened the door. I could not get beyond the back steps. The ancient lilac bush was lying on the ground, brought down by heavy snow. While it was standing it was difficult to realize how large it was but now on the morning of October 29<sup>th</sup> it took 5 large truck loads to pick it up. Only a very small segment remained to remind me of its former self. Only the creator knows if it will survive. One must think of the arrival of the spring of 2009 and of the robins return only to find their ancestral nesting place a thing of the past. Their feathered friends doubtless will not understand that this is part of nature's plan to create----to make another start. My feathered friends, I will miss you when spring arrives in Stone Arabia in 2009.

April, 2010

The year 2009 came and left with the lilac trying to survive. Some new shoots came up but not enough to support a robin nest. Now it is April, 2010. Spring has arrived in Stone Arabia. The lilac continues to grow. This morning I saw a plump deep red robin sitting in the largest part of the bush. He seemed to be surveying the area. We will never know if he is a descendant of those who were hatched in that bush over the years. Shortly he flew away apparently content to wait another year. Maybe he will return in early 2011 and find a solid limb to build on.

Spring 2012

This morning I saw the first robin – at least for me. He sat outside the kitchen window. I was looking out and he was looking in. Or am I flattering myself to think he gave a damn about looking in and seeing me. I have referred to the robin as him because he was so bright red. Are the bright colors bestowed upon him so he can valiantly protect his mate or is he just vain like some fancy dressing humans? This is an unusual bird because I never saw one so fat. If he had wintered way away to the south it is hard to visualize how he flew back with his bulk. We sometimes hear of a beer belly added to by the flower of the hops. Could he be an imbiber? Oh well, we will welcome him and wish him our best as a harbinger of spring.

March 9, 2012

Spring 2013

2011 and 2012 came and faded away. Still each spring robins came and inspected the ancestral nesting places. The old lilac bush thrives and promises to one day produce stronger places for new robins' nests.



About the first week in April 2013 a considerable number of robins arrived on my east lawn. They seemed to be welcoming spring. I noticed a strange looking bird with them. What could it be? Then I noted the typical robin red breast. However this was no typical robin. It had an almost purely white head and a few other white feathers. I told several people about my new friend. I can't say if they thought I was somewhat daft.

In the days that followed several robins returned to the place I first saw them. Usually the different robin would be with them. Often that bird alone would be near the house for a considerable time. It also was far more tame. I could approach to a few feet of it. Several friends did see this so very different robin. How I wished someone could get a photograph of this Stone Arabia visitor. At about 8:30 am on April 24 I called my good friend John De Valve and told him about the bird. John is a superb photographer and an amateur ornithologist. He immediately came. Right then the subject was not in sight. John said "I will try to call it". His cell phone gave out the robin notes. "Whitie", as I will call my different robin friend, immediately answered and came forward to have its picture recorded for posterity. Now I can show the photo to my friend Judy St Leger who I call my whale doctor, since she is a veterinarian for Sea World in California. There is a gargantuan step from whales to robins but I'm sure Judy will research my strange new friend and possibly determine its rarity. Strange things do happen in this old Stone Arabia settlement, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Skip Barshied, Stone Arabia, April 25, 2013

PS In closing I'll wish my different robin friend long life and happiness which brings fourth sweet notes