

Alarm in My Yard

The Curve Billed Thrasher alarm sounded this morning. My heart always leaps into my throat at that bird call, because I know it means there is a predator in the yard. It could be a fox or a roadrunner, but it also could be a snake and it could be my least favorite snake. The alarm, the "chuckle" as I call it, went on right outside the kitchen window. Oh great.

Hurrying to the window, I felt immediate relief when I saw a thrasher halfway up the trellis surrounding that side of the house, and looking up, not down. Rattlers aren't climbers. so I knew it was a climbing snake. Sure enough, there were black and white bands gliding along on top of the trellis roof over the kitchen window. I wiped my brow "whew" and resumed what I had been doing, content to let the birds duke it out with the kingsnake, though the snake hid.

Later I heard the call again and figured the snake had moved or was moving. I went out quietly so as not to disturb the bird activity and to locate the intruder. All the birds of the yard know what that "chuckle" means and come to aid the thrasher in driving off the intruder.



The kingsnake was just coming down a tree when I went out. The birds forego their fear of me while they attack the snake. It always amazes me how thrashers will run right up and peck, claw and beat the snake with their wings.

The other birds are not as brave but stick around at least as the support crew. I know the birds have seen me remove rattlesnakes. Sometimes, I wonder if they expect me to help them. I won't remove a kingsnake, though. Unfortunately kingsnakes clean out bird nests of babies and eggs which is distressing to me and the birds. But kingsnakes also eat other snakes including rattlers. So I tolerate kingsnakes. Not fair to my birds so I sort of feel like a traitor. Everything is a trade off!