

Gary Bogue: Birds: Why don't we see them after they die?

By Gary Bogue

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I know it's Spring

Because overnight the weeds

Are so much taller

— Nona Mock Wyman, haikuyun, Walnut Creek

Dear Gary:

There are thousands if not tens of thousands of birds flying around, nesting, etc., every day. So why don't we see dead bird carcasses on the ground after they've grown old and died?

It seems to me that given the number and species of birds flying around us all day, there would be hundreds of carcasses of dead birds falling to the ground.

I run daily and nightly and I can tell you that in my area, for say a one-year period, I have only seen one or two dead birds. I've seen more dead squirrels than dead birds on the ground.

Anyway, this question has always baffled me. Do birds fly back to their nests to die?

Hon Yeen, cyberspace

Dear Hon Yeen:

Dead birds go to the same place dead elephants go.

And the dead elephants go where all the other dead mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects, and spiders and ants and other dead critters go.

They fall to the ground when they die.

Mother Nature runs this whole planet as a very efficient recycling center.

Birds die and other animals and insects and bacteria immediately start to "recycle" the carcass. Vultures, opossums, foxes, raccoons, skunks, coyotes, hawks, etc., find and eat the bodies. Those dead birds that aren't immediately gobbled up provide splendid feasts for ants, beetles and other

crawly critters. Microscopic bacteria also join the banquet, breaking down body tissues (rotting; decay) and turning dead bodies into fertilizer to help create new life.

Natural processes are assisted by domestic dogs, cats and humans (animal services, Caltrans and various and sundry city, county and state agencies pick up and dispose of dead bodies).

It's also a BIG world and most birds are quite small. When they die and fall to the ground, they are hidden by grass, brush, etc. Many fall in wild areas where no people are around to see them. The end result is that dead birds and other creatures start to disappear almost as soon as they hit the ground.

I think it's amazing that we see as many dead animals as we do see.

Let's do it!

I need your help. We must raise \$8,750 a week for the next eight weeks so we can get \$70,000 for the Muir Heritage Land Trust to help them complete several critical acquisitions to preserve more local open spaces for us. (I explained this in more detail Sunday.)

"We" is you, me, school kids, businesses, foundations — anyone who cares anything about preserving open spaces.

No donation is too small (or too big!).

Please send your tax-deductible donation to: Muir Heritage Land Trust, "Save Our Open Spaces," P.O. Box 2452, Martinez, CA 94553. You can also donate online at www.muirheritagelandtrust.org.

When you get to their Web site, you will see a picture of me holding my cats. Just click on us and then following the instructions to donate to the Land Trust.

Let's do it! Thanks!