

Winging in from afar: the Gray Catbird

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

The birds we see in north central Washington during the summer months are different from those we see other times of year.

Migrating birds add variety and mystery to our bird-watching. I don't know a single bird enthusiast who doesn't look forward to spring or fall migrations. Different birds appear daily or weekly.

Anticipation builds this time of year and the birds rarely disappoint.

There are about 10,000 bird species around the globe, most of which we will never see in



Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.



central Washington.

A selection of bird checklists shows that Washington state enjoys nearly 500 species.

One of these is a seasonal migrant, the Gray Catbird, which winters as far away as the West Indies and visits us during the summer.

This bird is slightly smaller than an American Robin and much more elusive.

Robins are easily seen as they cavort in our yards and parks. Catbirds tend to skulk in the

depths of dense vegetation as they forage for insects, berries or seeds.

They are gray-bodied with a black cap — a combination that does not show up readily as they move around in low, dense vegetation at the edges of openings. Finding them usually results from seeing movement or, perhaps, hearing them and following the sounds.

The Gray Catbird is a mockingbird and, as such, has a wide variety of songs and calls.

Mockingbirds can mimic a lot of other bird's songs or calls. The Gray Catbird will imitate the calls of jays, kingfishers, swallows, grosbeak and others.

But their signature sound is when they call out sounding like a cat's meow. It's a distinctive sound that you will instantly recognize.

Don't be fooled and look down to find the hidden feline, look up and watch for movement. With any luck, you'll spot a Gray Catbird.

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