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COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Birdwatching in Augusta doesn't seem to get any better than now

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

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Anyone that might be a regular reader of my column, or maybe even knows me personally, can tell you I enjoy birds. I am not an ornithologist because I can't tell the difference between Gray Vireo and Hutton's Vireo. I just love birds.

Not only are we in the peak of bloom season in Augusta and surrounding areas, but birds are on the move. Nesting season is on and there are a lot of male birds acting like my friend Pooh Bear did when he was in college.

I came home from a pretty long day at work the other night and set up a chair in the driveway and sat there for a couple of hours just enjoying watching the mockingbirds chase each other, the bluebirds checking out the boxes I put out for them and the wrens being their busybody selves. It was so nice out that when the birds went to roost, I turned on some tunes and had to force myself to go inside.

Recently, my buddy Ed and his son met me out on the lake to throw a line for an hour or so before dark and we had a Bald Eagle fly right over us. Two Osprey were swooping around courting in a nest 50 yards from where we were anchored. We saw geese galore and at dusk two Great Blue Heron's flying to roost. It was like our personal bird show.

A couple of weeks ago, someone asked me about when the Cedar Waxwings come to town. Last Saturday, while running Masters errands, I spotted an "ear-full" of them flocking around a holly bush that was loaded with berries. And yes, I said "ear-full" in referring to a collective gathering of Cedar Waxwings. That is what a flock of those sleek berry feeders are called. They can also be referred to as a "museum" of waxwings.

This morning on the way to work, there was a museum of waxwings feasting on the Nellie R. Stevens hollies planted along Washington Road. Maybe they were trying to sneak a peek into

what might be going on at the golf course this week.

Campbell Vaughn: The stinging nettle weed is well named, but also has health benefits

Cedar Waxwings are so beautiful and animated. You will rarely see one waxwing because they love to be in groups. You will often find them in the spring in Augusta when the hollies are in full red berry mode.

These birds are about the size of a robin and are mostly nomadic. They are somewhat irregular in their movements/migrations mostly due to the available food supply. This time of year, and with the berry crop we have right now, they may stick around a little longer than normal.

Personally, I think they are one of the most striking of our songbirds. The feathers are silky smooth and almost slick. The very defined black mask has a little white edging that contrasts the tannish grey head and neck. The body moves from tan to light grey to a light pale yellow. The wings are pointed and grey with an occasional red streak. The tail has a very bright distinctive yellow on the tip.

If you get a chance to watch them flock to a berry bush to eat, take time to watch. It is well worth the time. The same goes for them getting in a birdbath. They love to plunge into some water in big groups and splash around for a bit.

The last bird sighting was the hummingbirds. I haven't seen one yet, but my red buckeye is about to be in full bloom which happens around this time every year. That is almost always the first time of year I see a hummingbird, so I am on the lookout starting Saturday. It is amazing how they know to follow the blooms of native plants to their summer nesting grounds every year.

It is a great time of year in Augusta. Blooms are fantastic, the birds are happy and there is a good chance we may see some great golf soon.

