

Black vultures and Urban Backyard

It was a hot lazy Saturday afternoon in the summer of 2011. As my husband prepared to leave for a weekend chore, I heard him call out lightly but with a tone of urgency from the front door – ‘Get your camera.... Hurry...’. While I scrambled to fetch my camera, I heard loud wing flapping.



Even more curious than before, I rushed towards the front door, where my husband stood absolutely still staring ahead. As I peered in the direction of his sight, I saw the most amazing sight – 2 black vultures on our stairwell! As I attempted to capture them on my camera, one of them took flight and landed just a few feet away with the second one joining it soon. As these majestic birds started to walk towards our bird feeders, I hurried inside to the window, to watch with heightened curiosity the reason for their stopover.

I held my breath wondering what their next move was - Would they continue walking? Would they land on my platform feeder? Were they attracted to my backyard by a dead animal? I was in for another surprise, when they slowly walked over to our bird bath plate.

Their next move was the least I expected. One of the larger vultures walked over unhesitatingly to the bird bath and started drinking water. It was soon joined by the second one. I had put up a flat dish as a bird bath a year back hoping to attract backyard birds to them, but had been disappointed till today. As the vultures continued to gulp down the water, I managed to capture them on my video camera. After what seemed like eternity, the stately birds walked away leaving me wondering – What attracted them to our urban backyard? Did they spot the water accidentally or were they used to visiting backyards with feeder for water?

Surely they did not spot the water while flying above. The flat dish which holds water for the birds is not visible from up above the skies due to the thick canopy. And since they were on the stairwell when we first spotted them, it must have been something else that brought them here. Showing opportunistic tendencies, they must have consumed the water upon noticing it. That makes me wonder if these vultures are used to bird baths put out by humans near bird feeders and were on a lookout for it.

Our urban bird feeder backyard has always been full of surprises but this opportunity of watching these huge birds from so close is definitely one of the best surprises. A film is at http://www.flickr.com/photos/mehta_rohini/5995876676/in/photostream

Rohini Mehta and Deapesh Misra