



The Greater Roadrunner

It is a Bird eat Bird world!

Ink Free # 9

July, 2024

Wildlife, even within urban settings stolen from nature, offers lessons, beauty, and natural reality. I believe we are lucky to live where coyotes patrol for small game, Havalina packs smash among natural and urban gardens, rattlesnakes feast on rodents, and birds forage, feast, mate, fledge, and proliferate. There are many other critters in the Arizona-Sonora Desert, too. Among them, better known in cartoons, is the Greater Roadrunner. Few among us do not whisper Beep Beep or fear standing on the giant X if the Roadrunner is the conversation topic. But they are fierce killers.



Twice since returning to Tucson in 2019, witness I have, Geococcyx Californianus, emerge from hiding to quench his hunger. Most recently, on a 111



-degree day in July, mid-afternoon, we gaped in excitement and cuteness killing horror as our local Roadrunner lounging in a water dish suddenly hunkers down, looking up and leaps up three feet to a feeder coming back down with a small bird. I photograph 800 millimeters into the shadows of bushes through an all-too-dirty window. Seven hundred sixty-three images document this

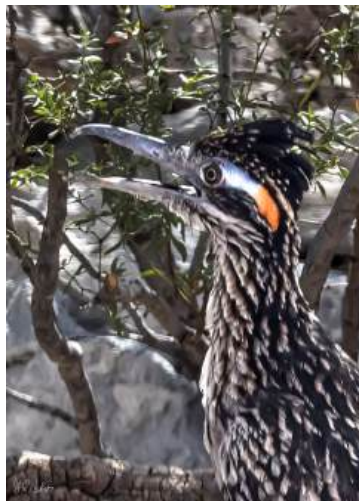
once loveable bird plucking the feathers from the Finch, banging him on the rocks to ensure death finally swallows Mr. House Finch head first. Over about 15 minutes, we three stood motionless, noses pressing the glass. Done, our Cockcoo family bird stands straight with its beak open. Soon, he returns to the birdbath, sits down, takes a drink, and relaxes for over an hour.



I wait until the next day to download and review my images. My daughter peers over my shoulder as I scroll through Photoshop, one image at a time, tagging the ones perhaps worthy of further cropping or processing. Slide after image, my large computer screen's screen is downright graphic. You might need a TV-type warning that the following may be disturbing to some; viewer discretion is advised.



A few friends reacted to my small collection, two saying, "WOW, great captures," a PhD biologist *"Greg, thanks for posting the sequence. Biology isn't always easy to watch, but it is the way nature works. Great documentation"*.



Yet another gifted photographer commented, "These birds amaze me. I just wish their diet consisted of grass!!! Great shots. I have regulars in my yards this year." There were several Facebook 'likes' and no other comments. Too graphic, perhaps.



A few years prior, the second dramatic Roadrunner encounter previewed a different benefit from this ground bird. I found and encouraged two rattlesnakes to leave where I wanted to plant desert-friendly agave, pushing them to the desert with a long-handled shovel. The second turn struck the shovel before speeding off. Our local Roadrunner nailed him before the backward-looking rattler reached the fence. I had no idea Beep Beep populated my audience, but there he was. I saw nothing of what happened next. He can keep the snakes away anytime. I am not a snake killer, but I am a fan of nature. Some events are easier to witness than others. Just sayen!

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Pondering along in old age without fear, excepting what I can do
Enjoying every minute of it!