

Glimpses of Brillion

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The low-lying portion of the golf course near which I live was inundated by melting snow and copious rainfall, creating a temporary Mecca for all manner of waterfowl, ranging in size from green wing teal to trumpeter swan. One of life's better moments came early last week when I topped a rise overlooking a flooded area and I was greeted by what I considered to be a spectacular sight. A great egret was flying very low and straight toward me when it flared its broad wings, dropped its landing gear, and pitched back for a landing. It was a rare sight, measured in seconds, not minutes, but it was enough to make my day. Consider, if you will, a large snow-white bird with a wingspan exceeding five feet, yellow bill and black feet, brightly lit by the rising sun, momentarily suspended inches above the water, just before it drops into the wading pool. I have seen countless egrets during my short life, but that was the first sighting for me of one with its broad wings flared, momentarily motionless, as it descended into the shallow water.

Like many of you who aspire to learn which bird is singing, I have this App from Cornell University on my I-phone that identifies birds by their song (or twittering). When asked to update my system, I was told that the update could take place only if I removed some of the Apps. Since it was mid-winter with not much new happening in the bird world, my bird identifier, Merlin, was selected as one to set aside. And then spring came, along with the input of fresh voices, and I had to put Merlin back online. The typical voice count in each morning is around twenty-five, and they are not always the same ones.

Yesterday I heard a beautiful melody emanating from a nearby tree, but I could not see the source. No problem. I checked to see what Merlin thinks. Brown thrasher! For me, that was a nice surprise. I have known for years what brown thrashers look like – nondescript monochromatic brown birds, fairly large, with no features to recommend them to the viewer. If they're not the last bird I would expect to produce such a lovely melody, they are surely second last.

A lilting, more familiar song greeted me last week also – it was a house wren, and it came and went through the opening of our wren house in the garden like it really belonged. We had a nesting pair that used the bird house last year and this may have been one of the former occupants returning for a summer of rent-free usage. There is really no way to know if it is the former occupant or not; they all look alike, and they have no name tags.

A larger puzzle resulted from a galloping squirrel. I chanced to be looking out the window and observed a gray squirrel bounding across the golf course fairway, making straight toward our garden. It never slowed, never wavered, but came straight toward the corner post of the garden. It did pause momentarily when it reached the corner post, prior to executing a left turn into the untilled garden plot.

It then went about six feet, stopped, half turned, and started digging. After what seemed like a couple minutes, it pulled something out of the excavation it had made, latched onto it, and bound back across the fairway in the direction from whence it had come. The question posed by this performance is "How did that squirrel know where to dig?" I have, in winter months, observed excavations made by squirrels that descended through ten or twelve inches of snow, obviously made in a quest for buried acorns, but what was this one digging for in my garden? Could it have been a walnut from the nearby tree that had a bumper crop last year? If so, how did it know where to dig?

In late 2024 I purchased some raspberry bushes that the vendor said were three-year-old plants, and that I would get a crop of raspberries in 2025. Not much happened in 2025. I think I may have harvested a cup of raspberries, and I was not overjoyed. Meanwhile, I purchased a few additional plants in the spring of 2025, to augment what looked like a rather meager raspberry patch. Winter came, snow fell, and the berry bushes did nothing exciting, and I did nothing to help them along. Now it is springtime, and the bushes are sprouting a lot of tiny green leaves, but along with that, there are countless new sprouts coming up in the vicinity of the older bushes – I mean, there are close to a hundred little raspberry bushes growing in the vicinity of the older bushes. So, when I thought the bushes were doing nothing, they were sending out new root stock that I am hoping will result in a bumper crop of raspberries. Stay tuned for the final chapter.

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