



SONG OF THE CHICKADEE

February 3, 2012

The sound startles me. Familiar of course as if I had enjoyed it right along – and yet a call to make me ask just how long it had been.

How many months have I accepted the silence, blaming it (if I did at all, if I was even aware of it) on winter? The radio, always playing the local station's choice of classics, the howling winds as snow still falls, all the house sounds so familiarly accepted. But this?

Phoebe. Phoebe. Phoebe.

Of course it was not the phoebe, not in the middle of this severest of severe Februaries. But a bird nonetheless.

Susie. Susie. Susie.

Not the familiar chatter. That conversation must remain more nearly a harbinger of spring. And yet it is there. And has been.

A daily visitor at any (or all) of the feeders, the chickadee has remained silent through our long winter.



When did he stop singing in the fall? Are birdsongs here so much a part of my life that I fail to take account of when they stop?

The thought returns to haunt me. Or, I answer hoping for justification, perhaps it is more a matter of when windows are finally permanently closed against the brutality of winter.

Birds are a daily part of life here along the lake. When they aren't congregating at the feeders, I am immediately aware of the absence and look diligently for the hawk that I know must be keeping an eye out not too far away.

How could I not be equally aware of their calls? How could I so easily accept the silence when I am only too happily aware of their presence? Did it happen all at once? I know they aren't going anywhere for the chickadee is one who will stay close all year long.

Is there a board meeting of birds in the fall when they select a final day to sing? I suspect that is no more likely than a unanimous decision to start up again in the springtime.

Perhaps it is time to keep a record of the sounds as well as the sightings. I know as my monthly lists pass the fourteen-year mark that, in spite of the vagaries of the weather, I could almost use the birds' return (or disappearance) as a reliable calendar. What, I wonder, do they know that we perhaps never shall?

It isn't a long call. But it is now a daily one. That happy little "Susie. Susie. Susie."

Well-fed and quite satisfied with his world, never mind the mess that seems to clutter so much of ours, he puffs his feathers and hunkers down as the winds whirl about and he sings. He undoubtedly has a variety which I have failed to recognize but I smile at what I hear.

Susie. Susie. Susie.

I know it won't be long before I hear his springtime chatter and the familiar chickadeedee. I shall wait for that as I eagerly wait for the next bird – and the next – to join in their happy serenade.

Written February 13, 2003.