

## The Raccoon War By: Corinne Simonson

My husband Gordon, an inveterate birdwatcher, put up a feeder in the backyard where he could pursue his hobby. He built a structure featuring a two sided access with an overhanging roof, half of which could be raised to replenish the seed inside. This he placed atop a six foot pole supported at the bottom by an oversized Christmas tree stand.

He proceeded to feed all year long and the birds rewarded his efforts by flocking in to help themselves to the free lunch. Cardinals, Blue jays, at least four kinds of woodpeckers, Nuthatches, thrushes of various sorts, an Indigo Bunting, and once an Oriole repaid his efforts providing pleasant scenery from our dining room window.

But, all of a sudden early this summer, the feeder unaccountably ran out of seed. Gordon was certain it had been at least half full the evening before. Could there have been a feeding frenzy during the night? He got out a ladder, raised one side of the hinged roof and refilled the feeder. Next morning, it was empty again. He refilled it.

After dark I was watching television in the living room and heard a shot. I galloped into our bedroom and found Gordon swearing as he put down the 22 rifle he occasionally loaded with birdshot pellets to discourage deer in our garden. "I missed the bugger," he said.

"What bugger?" I wanted to know.

"There was a raccoon on the bird feeder."

"How'd it get up there?"

"He climbed the pole, I suppose."

Thereafter it became a matter of filling the feeder every morning. Not that Gordon took the predilections lying down. He lurked in our darkened bedroom, rifle at the ready in front of the opened window. I was stationed by the exterior deck light switch and instructed to flip it upon command. I did so.

I heard a whoop from the bedroom, followed immediately by a report from the rifle. "There were four of the stinkers up there," he shouted.

"Did you hit any?"

"I don't think so. They all managed to disappear the minute you turned on the light. All I did was hurry them on their way."

After that the raccoons got shot at each night and totally without effect. Each morning found the feeder empty.

An idea occurred to me. “Why not put a screen door hook and eye up there on the roof? That ought to stop them. I said confidently.

“Great idea,” Gordon agreed.

Two nights of security followed, but on the third morning, we found the hook dangling from its own eye and the feeder, of course, empty.

Gordon is not one to let a batch of thieving raccoons get the better of him. He noticed that the roof was a little warped and he bent a kink in the shank of the screen door hook. This procedure tightened things up considerably. He had to lean his weight with one elbow on the roof in order to provide enough slack to detach the hook. That out to do it, he thought.

A couple of nights later I heard a cry of anguish from the bedroom-cum-watching post. He came running out. “You won’t believe this,” he said. “I saw this damn big ‘coon on the top of the feeder roof, using his full body weight to press down on the roof while he unlatched the hook.”

Next morning we told our daughter Mary about the wily raccoons who were eating us out of home and birdseed. She laughed. “I bet if you put a combination padlock on the feeder, it would take at least a week before they got it open.”

“That does it,” Gordon declared after she had left. He promptly left home on one of his frequent trips to the hardware store.

Noise emanated from his basement workshop for some hours, followed by employment for the posthole digger in the backyard. He finally called me to view the latest in raccoon deterring bird feeders.

I discovered a vertical length of PVC pipe established firmly in the ground with a larger pipe of the same material telescoped over it. Atop the larger pipe was a brand new bird feeder sitting on a circular plywood tray.

He handed me a large bolt. “Now when I raise the larger pipe, you will find a hole drilled in the smaller one. Shove in the bolt so that the upper pipe can rest on it.”

We are finding that this ingenious contraption works very well. It stands ten feet tall making it even more visible from the dining room than the old one. The PVC pipe is smooth and critters, be they ‘coons or squirrels, can’t climb it. The birds appreciate the large tray below the feeder. They seem to cooperate in using it. Blue jays sweep seed out of the feeder with their bills while other species like picking it up from the flat surface rather than out of the feeder

Now all we have to worry about from the raccoons is whether they will beat us to the sweet corn in our garden.