

Outside My Window

I could see many species during Covid confinement—even from my Paris apartment. Nature is nearby.

I have made [daily confined chronicles](#) (in French) during the Paris Covid quarantine, and here are some recent observations from our home in Pantin, in the north-eastern suburbs of Paris.

The Coal Titmouse family that took up residence in the hole in my neighbour's wall left their nest this morning. Of the six youngsters, one ended up biting a Magpie, but the other five spent their day patiently waiting for their food in the cherry tree in the courtyard. Here is a daytime photo of one of the youngsters, freshly emerged:



This essay is part of the new initiative: TNOC Francophone.

A couple of Black Redheads, who are probably nesting in the nearby street, are discreet. The male now only sings a few times a day. Ten days ago, a young male (a 2 year old) came to compete with the black male that usually occupies the premises. The female was interested in him, the old male sometimes tried to chase him away, but most often lost interest. The romance was intense (chases and flights in pairs all day long) but short. I never saw him again; it was only a passing fling, but maybe he took advantage of it to mate discreetly as it

happens so often in birds

I was surprised during the confinement to hear the Black Redstart emitting several imitations, including the song of the Swift Warbler, the cry of the Leach Knight, and the Troglodyte, and babbling that I had never heard before.



But I had even more fun listening to the song of the Red-headed Redstart nesting across the street, in the grounds of the Berthelot School. It has been nesting there since last year (at least I had never seen it before), in the old wall in the back. I have now counted 14 species imitated by this very creative male, who spends his time to make song imitating the Grizzly Bear and the Creeper. Today, he gave me for the first time the song of the Cochevis, just before mating with his female!



Next to him, the Black-headed Warbler sings daily, but this male is not accustomed to the imitations that are common in the species.

So the confinement was an opportunity to learn things about very common species: I had never heard the song of the Magpie, for example, a kind of squeaky chatter, and during the month of March it happened to me several times!



We are 300m from the Pantin cemetery. For the past 2-3 years, a couple of Hobby Falcons have been nesting there. This is remarkable, only 500m from Paris. But it also happens in the woods of Vincennes and Boulogne, and in other peripheral cemeteries. Incredible how this species has regained its ground. When I go up on the roof, I am happy to see it from time to time passing by at roof level, and last week I heard the couple emitting some kind of little parakeet calls that I had never heard before, while one of them was holding a bird in the greenhouses.



We live 2-3 km as the crow flies from the Peregrine Falcon's nest in the Lilac Tower, and even today I saw the female circling above us. This luxury of urban ornithology is very recent. I used to dream about it when I was a kid; now it has become almost usual. What a change! I thought it was this couple until today I observed the two birds on an abandoned tower at the Porte de la Villette, visible from the end of my roof! It seems we have a new pilgrim couple to deal with, just on the edge of the Parisian ring road!



With the daily flight of the parakeets, our environment has changed at great speed. Not to mention the gulls, brown and silver, that I observe daily.



Today, with the good weather that followed the rain, I went back up on the roof. In two hours between, between two sessions reading emails, I saw a Black Kite and a migrating Osprey, and some Barn Swallows. Lucky break!

More classic observations: since March I've had several times the Sparrow Hawk, which I spotted thanks to the cries of Crows that come to mob it.



A big surprise: 10 days ago, on April 23rd, while I was on my computer outside like tonight, an Oedicnème started screaming for about twenty seconds! It's a strange dryland bird that loves quarries and other bare ground. The closest pair is about 15 km away, near Roissy-Charles-de-Gaulle airport, but the species is known to make fairly long journeys at night to feed and is talkative in flight.

It is not only birds, and apart from the house mice that spend time in our kitchen from time to time and the common Pipistrelle in flight in the evening, a few insects are passing by. During the nice weather last week, I had the daily visit of a Brown of the Pelargoniums on my neighbour's geraniums (photo below), a small butterfly introduced in the north of France. A Nemusian passed by briefly, the Buckthorn Azure is continuously present.



Xylocopes (the big black carpenter bees) are constantly patrolling and are surprisingly numerous and almost every day, one or two golden ketones come to forage. A Little Capricorn flew away from our wood pile, we may involuntarily participate in the installation of the species in one of the nearby parks! Horned Osmies were common a month ago but I hardly see them anymore.



A hoverfly that I had not often seen in town, *Merodon sylvestris*, made an appearance last week, and another species, *Myathropa florea*, seems interested in the soil of our little pine tree, it probably lays in it.



Happy last confined week!

(Note: Confinement was gradually lifted in France starting on 11 May 2020).

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Paris

On The Nature of Cities

All photos are by Maxime Zucca.