

## How My Love of Birds Started by Natalie Torres

This is the story of how my love of birds started.

It really all began with two Northern Cardinals, a male and a female. We saw them in our back yard 2 summers ago and I couldn't take my eyes off of them. I saw them kiss (later I knew this was the feeding ritual). Fast forward to January 2014: it was a cold winter and we had been hoping to see birds, especially those Cardinals, for a long time. So, my mom decided to go out and get a bird feeder. Of course, the birds didn't come for the first day, but the next day there were like 20 sparrows! And a bit later... there they were: two Cardinals, just a couple of feet from our window!

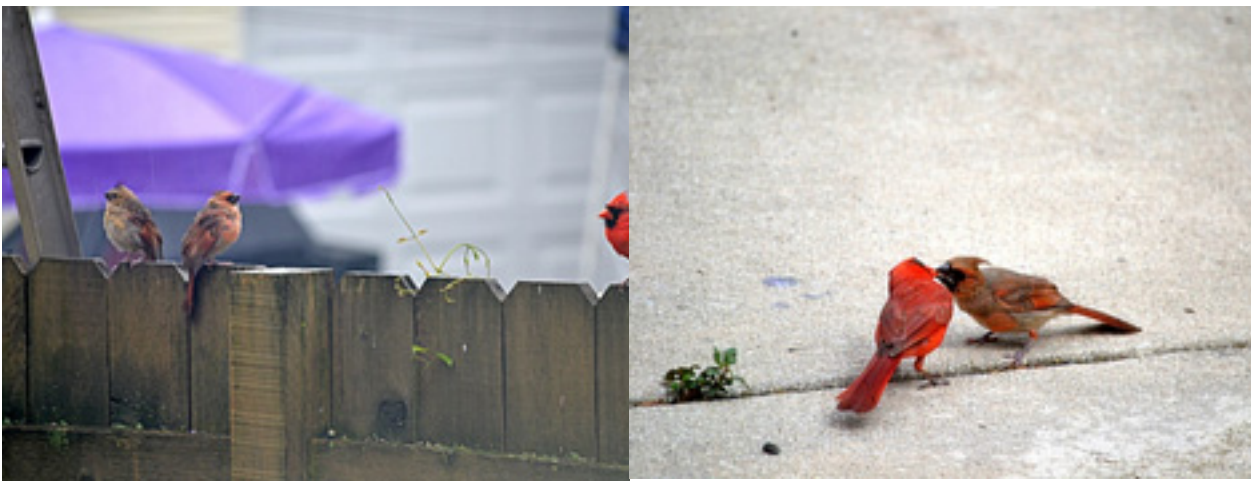


They came every day and we watched them like it was a non-stop television show! That's when I heard my dad say from behind me, "What's up, Jeffery? Not much, Laverne," as though the male and female Cardinals were talking to each other. At first I was laughing so hard at the thought of what my dad named them. But then I grew to love those names. When March came around, we wanted to put the hummingbird feeder in the front window and we moved the seed feeder to the back yard. It didn't take long for Jeffrey and Laverne to find it and make a lot of stops. We also had a lot of activity at the hummingbird feeder in the front.

My first field trip with ILYB was in May and after seeing so many incredible birds with my group, I couldn't learn enough. I already read about different birds and loved watching videos about them on my computer and reading about them whenever I could, but seeing them in their habitat and learning about them in the group made me realize this was something beyond the Cardinals that I loved...

Then, on June 6, we saw an odd brown bird that was tiny and we weren't sure what it was at first. It couldn't have been a Titmouse! I screamed when my mom said, "I think that's a juvenile Cardinal!" Laverne was on the wire above and the odd bird flew from our table right next to her. Jeffrey and Laverne had a baby! I cried tears of joy for about two hours.

A few weeks later we saw another baby! And then another! Two girls and a boy!



We named them Emily, Elenor, and Edward. Sometimes they would all visit at the same time, and other times it would be just Jeffrey with one or two of the babies. Any time we saw them we felt it was an honor. Over the summer we continued to watch the family and how they interacted, never getting tired of seeing the “Feed-Me Flutter.” Since then, my hobby of birding has become a passion and I have gone on several outings with my mom, observing and coming back to learn more about what we discovered. I know that if it wasn’t for my first field trip with ILYB and my leaders Matt and Josh, I would still love looking out my window and watching the Cardinals and other birds in our neighborhood, but now I know I can explore beyond my front door.