



Coming up to my feet, while I was sitting on the porch, walked the first one —an Oregon Snowbird. I get the feeling he may never haveⁿ seen a human before, but he and his relatives have just flown from their breeding grounds on the Cascade peaks, where probably the first snow has fallen, to their winter quarters on our farm.

They are remarkably frisky little visitors, seemingly finding great delicacies as they scratch the ground. They have several names. The official one is probably “Dark-eyed Junco” but throughout our

nation's history they have simply been called "snowbirds." In 1831 John Audubon wrote: "*There is not a person in the Union who does not know the little snowbird ... so gentle and tame does it become that it forms a companion for every child.*" And their call is such a wonderful overture to the slowly changing season. Many years ago someone described their tinkling song as if "*a myriad of woodland sprites were shaking little bells in an intensive competition.*"

I'm sure there is a scientific way of expressing this, but despite the fact that most birds have a violent end to life they value peaceful and cooperative existence. Migration is necessary so they work out a way of doing it. They cooperate and share, especially with the young whom they protect as best they can. Watching the birds and listening to them I experience the shadow of some of the troubles facing humans today.

Recently António Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, announced there are now close to 8 million refugees in the world. They primarily come from five countries: Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Sudan and Syria. We are told that every time we blink a new displaced person is forced to flee." 81% of the refugees are being looked after by developing nations under great economic stress themselves. The meaning of these numbers? As Guterres put it: *They reflect individual suffering on a huge scale.*

By the end of this year two million people will have fled Syria alone. The UN will ask developed nations to take some of them. A few nations will likely do that. I hope our country will be one of them.

Numbers and statistics can take on a much greater meaning for me in the personal experiences of individuals. I was told that in the Syrian refugee camps 12 and 13-year-old girls are being married off. I saw some pictures. They looked sad. But they, as well as their parents, know the reason. The family can no longer feed them. Not long ago, on a drive into town, I noticed a girls soccer team practicing at a Middle School. You know how it is sometimes when you can't seem to get images out of your mind? Those local girls and the ones in the Syrian refugee camp keep coming up. There is nothing I can do, but I feel an obligation to be aware.

I hope that some Middle-Eastern relative of my visiting snowbirds can at least "*be a companion for every child*" who has had to flee from his or her home.

As for me here at Starcross, I don't think it will upset the balance of nature too much if I just scatter some surplus garden seeds around for our little visitors.

Yes, and with each toss there will be a prayer.

Brother Toby