



BLACK PHOEBE

The Black Phoebe is a favorite resident songster in our parks, yards and nature corridors wherever a water source is present. The sharp whistled call of the Black Phoebe is a very typical sound along creeks and ponds throughout the southwest. They abundantly sing out their name, phoe-be, phoe-be!, boldly declaring their vibrant presence.

Solitary feeders, they are “wait-and-sally” flycatchers, usually waiting on low perches for an insect to come into view and then flying out, grabbing it and returning to the same perch. There, it will wait, watch, and pump its tail.

Observers will notice that it catches insects in mid-air, or may hover while picking them from foliage or sometimes from water’s surface. They feed on a wide variety of insects including beetles, grasshoppers, crickets, wild bees, wasps, flies, moths, caterpillars. Indigestible parts of insects are coughed up as pellets.

The dapper appearance and stately stance of this distinctive flycatcher make a lasting impression upon the observer. It has mostly black-appearing, dark sooty-gray upperparts and a white belly ending at the upper breast with an inverted ‘V’ surrounded by a dark sooty-colored throat area. Black



Phoebes have a very large, squarish head that frequently shows a peak, like many other flycatchers. Adult males and females look alike. Juveniles have reddish-brown edges on feathers on their backs, most conspicuously on the edges of the wing coverts. Both parents actively feed their fledgling chicks and juveniles until maturity.

Black Phoebes are generally non-migratory, permanent residents in our community. The Black Phoebe is territorial, monogamous and pairing may last for up to five years. Their joyful calling, striking beauty and persistent insect suppression capabilities make them a valued year-round presence in the Urban Forest.

To learn more about the fascinating range of distinctive birds appearing in the Urban Forest and along the Shipley to Shore Nature Trail, visit: hbtrees.org/urban-forest-2/bird-watching-in-the-urban-forest

PHOTOS BY JAMES KENDALL, ESSAY BY BETTY KANNE

