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Fall bird migration is going mighty slow with the 80-degree afternoons and 50-degree lows on the flyways leading to the temperate zones from the Northlands. Warm November days and moderate nights stalled the birds all along the route toward Mexico and the Canal Zone. Vultures left the shortgrass country on schedule, but buzzards do so well in sheep country, they have to migrate before they weigh too much to get airborne.

One Canada goose flew over the ranch house last week headed back north. Most likely he had grown so much down from summering on a diet of high protein bullfrogs and fat arctic minnows, he was virtually a flying pillow subject to overheating. He was a single-minded goose. I watched him until he flew from sight. He never once looked back over his wings.

Eight southbound curlews landed in the pecan trees in the front yard in October - a decimation of numbers over the last half of the century from thousands covering the prairielands to eight survivors. I called an old partner of mine, who loves birds, to come out to see them.

Doesn't take long to see or count eight curlews. I had told him so many tales over the years, I didn't expect him to believe how many once covered the hills and playa lake beds up here on the Divide. I always am sorry I can't fit the truth into my stories. Be a big relief someday to find a topic lively enough to write a true story.

He wanted to know what happened to the curlew population. I thought a minute and answered: "Big cities poisoned the air and covered the earth in asphalt until curlews lost a place to breathe or roost." The reply startled him, and shocked me. Three decades of phony guilt were shed in one sentence.

When the movement started to protect the golden cheeked warbler in Central Texas by force-feeding the program down the landowners' throats, charges of habitat destruction were worded so powerfully that I began to feel guilty about my brush control program.

At the time, I was knocking down a lot of warbler perches, partnering with the REA to hold back the mesquite jungle around the headquarters by stacking the brush the Co-op cut away from the meter poles and powerline. Down on the highway, the privately owned utility company did further habitat damage by running a huge shredder down their lines and opening up a five-mile lane, 120 feet wide, giving me credit for over 40 acres of brush control.

The first time we passed the ewes and lambs across the utility right-of-way took longer than penning or going through a gate. Pink-eyed ewes suffering night blindness from the dust and Vitamin A deficiency followed the herd into the clearing to balk in the sunlight.

Wasn't hard to spot those old sisters as they spun around and fled back into the shadows. If the sun hadn't gone behind a cloud, we might have had to wait until dark to

cross under the high line. Yearling ewes are silly about shadows, but I'd have thought as hard as their lives had been the past five years of drouth, plus having to go under a highway bridge to be shorn, they'd have taken the Northwest Passage in stride.

So many election years have passed since the courts ruled in our favor, only a vague notion remains of the rights of private property in regards to controlling brush. But the gist of the rulings of the federal bench is that private property owners are obligated to provide habitat, range, and water for all the earth's creatures at the disposition and pleasure of the city folks, based on their whims and fancies for the season.

As further privilege of ownership, we are to plant and till, breed and care for livestock, gather, harvest and ship food to the cities at a loss not to exceed or absorb the capital to pay ad valorem and inheritance taxes.

Eight curlews have been all to pass through here so far. Haven't been any geese going either direction. Brown towhees do dig around in the grass out my kitchen window. Towhees, in case you don't have a book handy or a bird watcher around, are the gentle gray brownish birds easy to identify by the black dot on the breast.

Takes minutes to gentle a towhee to eat cornbread crumbs around your feet. Towhees make good pets. They don't run up vet bills, bite mailmen, or regurgitate hair balls on the kitchen floor. If I ever have a mascot it's going to be

a towhee. Then if the carbon monoxide fumes drift in from the cities, he and I can just move farther on west.