

BIRD BREAK

Ah, those early mornings on the lanai, the silence broken by the odd frog, a NAS JAX flyover, a too-early leaf blower, and *those birds!* Hard to ignore, with over 520 recorded species in our neck of the woods, including year-round residents, wintering migrants, and seasonal visitors. And those early-rising vocal few who take up the stage in the trees and bushes of our backyards. And ring in the day. As we plan our attack on the daylight hours with a cup of coffee and open ears.



The **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** is the anxious intern of the bird world, perpetually in motion, never quite sure why. Its call is a thin, reedy “*spee spee spee*”, the sonic equivalent of a complaint submitted through proper channels that will accomplish nothing. Its song riffs on and off its call, a kind of “*spee-you-boink-whibbidy-whibbidy*”. It’s approximately the size of a thumb but has apparently not been told this. The tail bobs constantly, like someone who needs to use the restroom but is too polite to mention it. It builds nests the size of a walnut, which seems optimistic. Ornithologists call it “energetic.” Therapists would call it something else entirely.



The **Northern Cardinal** begins with a few smug warm-up whistles: “*tweet tweet tweet*”, like a tiny red life coach who has already read the book and just wants you to know it. Then comes the main event: a looping, liquid slur that sounds remarkably like someone saying “*pretty pretty pretty*” or possibly “*cheer cheer cheer*”, depending on your emotional needs that morning. The female occasionally sings back, which ornithologists call “duetting” and married couples call “arguing.” Volume is non-negotiable. The cardinal has precisely one setting: louder.

It starts at 5 a.m. Every day. Forever. The song is aggressively punctual, with zero remorse



The **Carolina Wren** is the loudest small object on Earth, a fact it celebrates without restraint. Its song, “*teakettle teakettle teakettle*”, erupts from dense underbrush at a volume that suggests a bird four times its size has sublet the body. It weighs less than a AA battery and has the confidence of someone who has never once considered consequences. The cocked tail is non-negotiable, a permanent exclamation point on every opinion it holds, which are many. It will nest in your hanging flower basket, your garden boot, your soul. It did not ask permission. It does not require it.



Full disclosure: my thanks to Cornell Ornithology Lab for their brilliant ‘Merlin Bird ID’ app, which uses your phone to identify the birds in your backyard by their calls! You gotta try this! The rest I noodled up on my own. You know, before coffee when I gosome sense.

