

## Doing the Bird Spirit Medicine homework



I dowsed that my allotments would be an appropriate place to do the homework. On my way down the lane behind our house I could hear gulls calling loudly. They had young and were in protective mode. Walking along the path towards the allotment gate I heard goldfinches in the hedgerow. Once at the allotments I dowsed for the most favourable place to wait for the bird and sat down in an open area by a willow hedge. My strategy was not to actively seek but to wait and see what came to me. This in itself was a novel experience. I usually go to the allotments with a number of things in mind that I need to do, rather than simply to be. Sitting in a familiar tranquil and beautiful spot for an extended period simply observing and absorbing was something I had never really done before, other than for a few minutes now and then. In front of me was a short crabapple hedge I planted a few years ago as a windbreak. It was sunny and pleasant, but also very breezy, so I didn't expect to see many smaller birds. I waited and heard a brief snatch of blackbird song. Otherwise it was quiet. I waited on.

A magpie flew over. I caught a glimpse of a crow in a large eucalyptus tree. There were swifts flying high and herring gulls, then a wood pigeon flew by. I heard the blackbird singing again, but dowsed that it did not have medicine for me. Herring gulls again and a crow, then a magpie. No medicine. A swift. No medicine. I saw the magpie again. It disappeared then emerged once more, this time harrying a sparrow hawk, which flew away in front of it. Perhaps the magpie does have medicine for me?

Then I saw a single female house sparrow fly in and perch on a crab apple branch a few yards in front of me. She remained there for seven or eight minutes looking around her, watchful for predators, observing the ground near her, vigilant. She also looked towards me from time to time. I fancied that she modelled sitting and looking rather than constantly doing. I thought she had medicine for me, although I wasn't quite sure what it was. Eventually she flew to the hedge on the left of where I was sitting, stayed there briefly then returned to another branch near her original perching place. Afterwards I thought how unusual it was to see a single sparrow like that. Generally they move around in groups. At the time I felt a sense of patience rewarded and a process concluded, but perhaps not completed. I thanked the bird.

Some time later I remembered something which had happened there more than seven weeks previously and which I had forgotten about until then. There is a large old galvanised water tank half way down one of the paths on my plots. On top of it is a sheet of metal mesh to stop birds or animals falling in to the water. As I walked by I thought I saw a slight movement out of the corner of my eye. I went back and looked at the surface. There was something moving. I lifted the mesh and put my hand in and brought out a fledgling female sparrow, which had somehow dropped through the mesh into the water. It was trembling and weak and I thought it would probably die of shock and exhaustion. It was a warm sunny day and so I sat in the sun with the bird in my cupped hands. Its feathers dried out gradually and it slowly became more alert and lively. Eventually it was able to fly off to join a male sparrow and other fledglings waiting in the hedge.



I am not suggesting for a moment that the bird I saw was the bird which had nearly drowned that day, but remembering that incident certainly seemed to add an additional significance to what I had observed.

Soon after the homework afternoon I watched a Grahame Gardner workshop in the course of which he included the sparrow in a list of spirit animals.

I have thought a good deal about the whole experience since and am still not sure exactly how to interpret what happened. It would have been interesting to know how Karen Stead-Dexter would have explained it!

Martin Blacher