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Well, it is winter, I guess where you are too.

One of these cold, wet, windy days I went to the library, and on the way back to the bus I passed the village butcher's shop. His windows don't usually catch my eye, but this day they did - or rather the big balls of white fat on display caught my eye. Ha, I thought, that might be the equivalent for a cup of coffee for my feathered friends! So I bought one and when I got home I braved the rain and hung the ball straightaway onto a branch of my puka tree, right in front of my windows. The big, leathery puka leaves offer some shelter from the wind and rain; I've seen silvereyes congregate there before, looking for I don't know what. While I made myself a human cup of coffee and enjoyed it, I watched out for the birds.

It didn't take the silvereyes long to find out what that peculiar white ball was. Unlike the belligerent tuis, the little silvereyes are friendly people, gregarious and sociable. They talk to each other while waiting for their turn on the birdball: One is on top of the ball, one hangs onto it and after a few beakfuls it is somebody else's turn. They provide great entertainment - actually, not only to me, but also to the cat; better than TV, she thinks. As my temperament has rubbed off on her, she thinks watching is enough; catching would be great, if only it wasn't such an effort. And as food comes her way regularly, without her getting a paw wet, she resigned herself to being a mere spectator.

The other day a friend dropped in. My friend is a very kind, thoughtful person, and I assumed she'd support my arrangement and get as much enjoyment out of the fatball as I do. We watched the spectacle for a while; the silvereyes were obviously happy, took turns, chatted, came back for a second and third helping - perfect harmony and

joy. But my friend, who has a few health issues herself, didn't share my pleasure. She said so much fat might not be healthy for the birds; they might develop high cholesterol levels and high blood pressure or get obese and soon die of a heart attack.

For a moment I was taken aback and considered her reservations. None of the silvereyes looked remotely obese, on the contrary. But cholesterol? High blood pressure? People suffer from this without noticing; only a check-up at the doctor's will reveal the bad news. I saw no way how to get the birds to a medical checkup.

Before I got too worried, however, I thought of a good friend in Switzerland who used to say "nid gläbt isch au gschtorbe". The birds like the fat, and it is cold, and they need some food to warm them up - so why not eat something that might be not terribly good for their heart, but makes them happy? I'm a great believer in the theory that whatever makes you happy is good for you - within reason, yes. But worrying about health can be worse than eating a bit of unhealthy fat. And if the silvereyes drop dead because of high cholesterol, at least they do so with a full tummy.

Trudi

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