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**The Remarkable Absence of Birds
(XXXIVth Birthday Poem)**

Glen Phillips
Edith Cowan University
2001

In the Little Goose Pagoda finally
I found them. Not many, they clustered
round an ancient two-wheeled cart
that also rested on the grass. Leaves
lay thickly, brown as these sparrows.

From dun tower of 'Il Cenino',
under dark oak beams, ribbed tiles,
I saw at last the swoop of circling swallows
nesting in the sheltered eaves.
By home and hearth we too had awaited flight.

I strained to hear in Salcombe's night of storm
the fabled moaning of the bar.
Came morning and from casement opened
could see to where meadow cleaves
green to headland across gull-strewn bay.

Now our garden is alive with sound
and flutter of a nomad crew. Clean
mudlarks dip and drink, honeyeaters fumble
gold-dusted bottle-brush, like thieves
in a crowded market. Wattlers scold

and scatter in our almond tree, where
twenty-eight parrots dissect nuts
adroitly passed from claw to beak. Stepping
and stooping to peck in grass, a pair of doves
from Malabar ignore a willy-wagtail's fuss.

Thriving here beneath our sun reminds
that under plumage is a heart that believes
their long flight from nuclear winter proves
they loved life. And this determines who survives.