

Morning View Kentucky
4 March 1959

Hello Mr. McCarthy,

Somehow, perhaps under the cover of stormy nights, the local pair of great horned owls succeeded, last month, in accomplishing what they have been trying to do for years. They are nesting in the tree patch. Because this particular species of owl is becoming very scarce in our area, I have permitted them to seek refuge in the big trees during hunting season, but have discouraged their nesting or feeding here because they would frighten -- and eat -- my birds and little animals.

Great horned owls reign as killers over their territory, taking a heavy toll of the inhabitants of woodland and meadow. However, to their credit, theirs is not the murderous, wanton slaughter of the weasel. They hunt only for food, the trouble lying in the fact that they are enormous birds and their appetites are proportionately huge.

A tree full of sudden, squalling crows brought the big owls' nest to my attention. Near the northern edge of the tree patch stands a great white oak, which, by some long-ago mishap, lost its main trunk about fifty feet above the ground. Through the years, vast branches grew steeply upward from just below the break, and formed a great rounded dome high above.

I frightened the crows away from this tree and looked suspiciously at the stub of the original trunk. It is as big as a barrel and, of course, has been hollowed out by exposure. Obviously something was in it.

Whacking the tree with a stick brought the giant female horned owl immediately and indignantly out of the cavity. She peered uncertainly down at me, and, because the day was heavily clouded, could identify me. When she flew, she was so big she frightened me, apparently more than I frightened her, for she changed her mind and circled back to the nest. Again the great face with its sharp, feathered horns glared down at me, then she was gone into the stub.

I was sure she was nesting there or she would not have otherwise returned while I still stood at the foot of the tree. I knew I could verify the nest if I could locate the male owl nearby, so called some blue jays to assist in the hunt. I gave them peanuts, then walked slowly under likely trees, until, those peanuts consumed, the jays came tagging along for more.

At an ancient oak, they forgot peanuts, and, clustering about a hole high in its trunk, shouted seriously. Blue jays are very easy to understand, and this calling was the urgent announcement of the presence of a deadly enemy, completely unlike their playful hubbub