

On being a farm wife - And other hazards Joyce Bupp



"Look at this," said The Farmer one morning last fall, displaying a highly-unusual "find."

The grisly thing he dangled before my eyes looked like something out of a Stephen B. King horror flick. Hollow eye sockets stared blankly from a roundish, beige skull. And attached to the skull was a ragged-looking, stiff and misshapen skeletal system.

But rather than revulsion, the sorry-looking specimen instead brought us sorrow and disappointment. A few large, brownish-marked feathers still clinging to the skeletal structure, plus much smaller and finer feathering near the taloned feet, testified that these remains had once been a proud bird of prey.

But what? Hawk? Or owl?

The remains had come out of one of the silos with the morning's running of corn silage for the cattle. Hawks don't generally hang around the interior of silos where they could meet such an untimely end in a winter's supply of cattle forage.

But, barn owls find the lofty reaches of farm silos the bird-world equivalent of a penthouse suite. And we've known of barn owls hanging around the silos off and on for several years. Comparing clues from the remains with

descriptions in our birding books, we concluded that the skeletal remains were indeed those of a barn owl.

We feel particularly honored - and with a sense of responsibility toward them - when varying species of birds and wildlife choose to share our territory, especially those that might be somewhat endangered.

The dozen-plus bluebird houses scattered over the property, the mid-pond goose nest platform that lured in our first hatching pair of Canada geese last year, and a pair of martin houses near the ponds offer housing to local and transient feathered friends. A variety of bird feeders around the yard caters to their appetites. Now, inadvertently, we may have set up an owl feeder of sorts.

We first heard the classic "Whoooo, whoooo" of a Great Horned owl (we think) last fall, just about the same time the barn owl skeleton turned up in the feed conveyor system. A coincidence, no doubt.

The haunting sound was right overhead in the old maples, but half-asleep, at midnight, I failed to hop out of bed and go looking for this unusual visitor. A few nights later, though, the deep-throated call sounded again just outside the

house. Flashlight in hand, I stalked to the corner of the front porch into a cold night, aimed the glow toward a tree and a wide-winged shadow sailed away over the back yard.

"Dummy!" I growled at myself. "Now you've scared it off."

But on a brilliantly moonlight night shortly after, as I headed to the house after milking, the dark, wide-winged shape sailed back into the yard, landing near the top of the towering old pine tree. The large bird remained there long enough for me to run back to the barn office, rush back with The Farmer in tow, and watch the dark shape glide back off into the glowing night.

Why would this large owl suddenly move in? Just below the house and near the ponds is a stack of large, round hay bales. Mice make themselves right at home among the bales, which provide shelter and provisions during the cold months. So the cats daily stalk the bales, and foxes are frequent visitors at more distant storage stacks. Owls, apparently, come to the big-bale mice buffet, too.

A large, oblong, one-side-open plywood box sits in the basement, neatly stenciled with the words "Barn Owls Only." This wonderful gift from close friends is designed to be located inside the uppermost corner of a barn where it faces an open meadow. An opening cut into the barn allows the owls entry into the nesting box, designed with a sturdy door for cleanout and reinforcement against nest-robbing raccoons.

Maybe next time The Farmer comes with a "look at this" owl surprise, it will be to point out a real live one moving in.

Mulch young trees and shrubs with well-rotted manure, leaves, wood chips or peat moss.

Facts About Rubber Bands

Here are some facts about rubber bands that may stretch your imagination. Did you know that:

- The United States government has 10 pages of specifications for standard rubber bands, including a requirement that tensile (breaking) strength be 1,200 pounds per square inch. One manufacturer, Arrow Rubber Products of Shelton, Connecticut, produces bands that require more than twice that strength to break. Arrow's bands exceed 3,000 pounds of tensile strength per square inch and stretch to more than seven times their original length.

- Pure, natural rubber gives a better snap than synthetic materials that don't provide quality. Poor quality bands don't snap back to their original size and don't last as long.

- Arrow Rubber only uses important natural rubber from Southeast Asia to make its bands — rubber right from the tree. The tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*, is tapped just like trees in New England are tapped for maple syrup. A thin layer of bark is removed allowing the raw latex to drip into a cup for about three or four hours. The liquid is then coagulated and pro-

cessed into bales that are shipped to manufacturers elsewhere in the world.

- The largest bands made by Arrow are about six inches in diameter and will stretch to go around 55 gallon steel drums. The smallest have a diameter of just 90 thousandths of an inch.

- Rubber bands have many industrial uses. They're used to manufacture golf balls - holding the ball as a machine wraps elastic around a core. Rubber bands are also used to manufacture aerospace equipment and by photographers for extra grip on stuck tripod knobs.

- High quality rubber bands are needed to hold the ropes in a parachute (called shroud lines) — to make sure the chute opens as it should when someone jumps from a plane.

- Christopher Columbus first observed people native to Haiti playing a game with a ball fashioned from smoked-dried latex. Today, rubber and rubber bands are in use everywhere, from sling shots to orthodontical works, holding lobster claws, in toys and even for grooming horses.

Encourage Children To Read

Did you know that of the 42 million children in the United States two out of three cannot read, won't read or hate to read. Schools spend a tremendous amount of time and energy teaching children to read. But the primary problem is that parents, teachers and child care providers have forgotten to teach children to want to read. Desire is not something children are born with. It is a seed planted early in a child. The adult plants this seed by reading to the

child and introducing the child to the joy and excitement that comes from books.

Children learn through imitation. They imitate the adults in their environment. Between the ages of two and five imitation is at its greatest. If children see adults reading they will come to view reading as something good and desirable.

Encourage a child's desire to read by:

- Begin reading to a child as soon as possible. Use large picture books and Mother Goose rhymes for infants and toddlers. Increase the complexity of the books as the child grows and the attention span lengthens.

- have a special time every day for stories, perhaps before nap time.

- Use plenty of expression. Change your tone of voice to fit the story.

- Make story time special. Occasionally try something new (a stuffed toy, a felt character from the story) to add interest and excitement.

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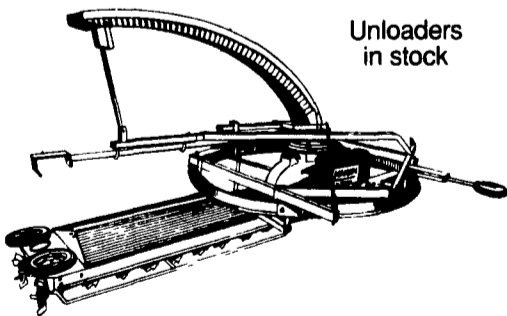
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