

To not kill a mockingbird

It doesn't get much better than Mother Nature doing her spring thing in Jefferson Township. Deer and turkey always seem to be around the next bend along our country roads. Trees and plants seem to come bursting forth with life. And sunrises over open farmland create awe-inspiring landscapes.

I especially look forward to the variety of bird species and their beautiful melodies that grace our surroundings each year. The bluebird is my favorite, but the tree swallows that dart back and forth over our pasture have begun to grow on me. These friendly creatures almost let you touch them when they sit atop the fence posts. Yes, Jefferson Township is remarkably beautiful. I can't think of another place I'd rather be.

At least until a highly motivated intruder came calling a month ago.

This fateful turn of events began during a slumber as a gentle breeze blew fresh air through a bedroom window we had finally cracked open. What sounded like a flock of panicked birds chirping wildly began at 3:30 in the morning.

"What on earth is going on?" my wife whispered as we both woke up from our deep sleep. Being the self-assured nature expert that I am, I said, "Oh, it's got to be one of the barn cats up in a tree. It must have got hold of a bird's nest or something. It's nothing more than the circle of life, I reckon. Is country living great or what," I chuckled.

Amazingly, the noisy ruckus continued and continued. Through my broken sleep the loud, panicked bird sounds never stopped. Whatever was



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going on in our trees lasted until our alarm clock went off. But I sloughed it off as no big deal. Mother Nature, after all, is full of interesting surprises.

Incredibly, what I thought was an isolated incident began repeating itself in the wee hours each night. Didn't these birds ever sleep?

Finally I had it. I got up when dawn approached, looked up into the tree in front of our house and was surprised to find a single bird making what seemed like 50 different sounds nonstop. It was a one-bird band.

"What on earth are you?" I cried out to the bird. The bird ignored me and continued to chirp loudly. I decided to pick up a small stone and throw it near the bird so I could get a better look as it flew away. It was grayish with distinctive white bars on its wings. I ran to my bird book and discovered that we had a northern mockingbird.

Unfortunately, as I read further I learned the prognosis was not good. Apparently a

lonely male will sing loudly through the night looking for love in his territory. "His territory?" I said to myself. "Please don't tell me this thing is looking for love in my yard. I don't want a flock of these things returning here each year to make our home their home."

As much of a nature lover as I am, I have to admit a diabolical thought did cross my mind. "How to kill a mockingbird might be more than a novel," I thought.

No, you're right. I couldn't do that. But perhaps one of our barn cats could. Maybe I could hoist one of our small game-killing machines up into the tree at night to give it a head start. "Here kitty, kitty", I shouted out in search of Penelope.

After I regained my senses, I googled for solutions and ruled out the many that would kill it. This left me with two unappealing choices.

The first was to stick some kind of large magnet in the tree that would somehow throw off its homing device. The problem with this is the bird continually jumped from one tree to another around our house. Apparently our house was its home base.

The second solution was to purchase a fake owl. But this would chase away all the birds I wanted to stick around in our yard.

But I had good news on a recent morning. I didn't hear from Mr. Mockingbird. I looked around the yard with my binoculars and did a double-take as I saw two mockingbirds gazing at each other. I guess love really is the answer. 6/11/09

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