

Morning View Kentucky
10 May 1957

Hello Mr. McCarthy,

Each spring as the weeds push up through the cushiony leaf mold of the tree patch, they find me waiting with well sharpened hoe, an inexplicable waste of time in the eyes of my neighbors who understand hoeing tobacco patches or gardens or even flower beds on occasion, but whose activities have never included weeding a woodlot. I will never wholly exterminate the weeds, of course, new seeds from surrounding areas constantly arriving by bird, animal, or breeze. But I have almost entirely eradicated several noxious species I particularly dislike, one the creeping, cling Stick-tight, the other a coarse-leaved brute whose name I do not know. I am sorry I do not like poke greens, for I am sure at least a million of them have fallen before my hoe. I can only bring complete destruction to infantile plants, the massive roots of the older ones being impervious to anything less than assault with an ax. I am testing the theory that, if I keep hacking down their sprouts, even those vast root systems will eventually succumb through lack of foliage.

Whenever I find an attractive oak or hickory seedling, I respectfully clear a large spot around it so that when, later in the season, I swish through the frail annual weeds with a grass whip, I will not behead it. Having cleared so carefully around the seedling, I usually cannot find it again.

My weeding amid the trees last week was erratic in the extreme. Occasionally I hoed steadily in one area for many minutes. At other times I might only destroy two or three weeds before suddenly departing for another section of the tree patch.

Acutally the hoeing was of secondary importance. The Audubon Woodpecker was here and it was the best way to follow him about and watch him. I am noisy with my birds, greeting them as they pass, and calling them with a goodly bellow, as though they were dogs, when I put out their food. The first few times I called the birds, after moving here, cows in distant pastures, on other ridges, stirred and responded. Were I to creep silently through the woods to watch the Audubon, the first Titmouse or Blue Jay who saw me would spread the alarm that I was stalking an enemy, and in a few minutes the entire tree patch would erupt in excited turmoil. Observation would be impossible.

This spring the Audubon was unusually accomodating. He remained eight days. After the third day it was no longer necessary to follow him, for his activities centered about the feeder near the house and he seldom left the trees in its vicinity. To my delight, he learned quickly and became as prompt in swooping down to the pile of raw peanuts as were the Woodpeckers who make this their permanent residence.