

Morning View Kentucky

28 May 1957

Hello Mr. McCarthy,

When you asked about the peanuts, I was sitting in chilled discomfort on a not-too-dry log watching young Downy Woodpeckers emerging from their nest in a small dead maple stub a few feet away. Heavy clouds had eclipsed the clarity of the morning and the wind had become cold, but I remained on the log, unable to resist the fascination of the scene before me. By continuous, frantic effort, the struggling parents were coaxing the giddy little fellows from their carven home into uncertain flight which was theoretically aimed at the suet tree some 300 feet away. As is usual, each youngster, once awing, promptly set off in the wrong direction. The din was sufficient to attract every predator within hundreds of feet.

As to the raw peanuts. I started buying them separately because there were not enough of them in the general mixed bird food. Practically all birds save doves and quail like peanuts, with the result that they were quickly gone, leaving only food of interest to grain eaters. It was necessary to put out far too much of the mixed food in order to keep peanuts on hand for Chickadees and Titmice and others who do not eat grain.

At first I bought a few pounds of roasted ones at a time until the dealer suggested that raw ones would be better for the birds because of their higher oil content. As the birds increased, I settled into a routine of buying 100 pounds at a time, always in the shell as they remain so much fresher that way. The rate of consumption varies, with two peaks, one during late winter, and the other when the greatest number of young are leaving the nests; but it averages about 500 pounds a year.

As to the method of feeding the raw peanuts. Smaller birds cannot shell them, so in the morning I shell enough to take around to the feeders, then a few at a time as I need them during the day. Several of the feeders are simply big flat rocks at the base of a tree. When I supply them with peanuts, I place a mound of the shelled nuts upon the rock and gently step on it so that some are broken up and others are not. Then I build a little pile of unshelled ones for the Blue Jays and squirrels.

When feeding Chickadees and other little fellows, I squeeze a single shelled nut between thumb and finger, thus splitting it in half, which size they handle with ease. Cardinals, the larger Woodpeckers, and birds of that size prefer the peanut shelled but left whole.