

Morning View Kentucky
11 June 1957

Hello Mr. McCarthy,

This is the season when events swirl to a peak in the tree patch, a veritable Niagara of activity engulfing the area. As the little-bird-protective-department, I work overtime, while nests launch dozens of assorted fledglings upon their initial venture into the perilous outside world. Very noisy, very young birds are everywhere. Having concentrated the birds here, I feel responsible for their safety.

At the moment I am keeping a careful watch over the progress of four Orchard Orioles across the lawn to the shelter of the maple copse. They are delightful fluffs of gold and grey, tumbling awkwardly through the short grass, defenseless against hawk or snake or starling. Larger, but equally helpless, young Blue Jays from a neighboring tree are traveling the same route which conveniently enables me to maintain a guardian observation over two families at one time.

Our chief enemies this spring are starlings and an unexpected invasion of snakes. Starlings like to nest in holes in trees, but cannot carve them. Hence, with amazing viciousness, they drive even the largest woodpeckers from nests they have built, and take over the holes for themselves, first eating any woodpecker eggs or babies that might be within. Whenever I hear a woodpecker distress call, I hurry to shoot the marauding starling. Another evil starling habit is raiding nests of almost any song birds and eating the young. Great clouds of starlings have moved into this area in the last few years, keeping me busy battling them.

Fortunately, I have considerable help in detecting the sudden snakes. Blue Jays hate them, and have a special call for announcing the presence of a snake. Having learned it, I am always aware the moment they find a snake. I think few people believe me when I abruptly excuse myself and dash off, explaining that the Jays are saying snake. I have a feeling that they suspect me of something akin to witchcraft when I presently return followed by the eldest dog who is joyously waving a large dead black snake.

I am well aware that a black snake on a farm is a useful creature. But when he is in the tree patch, he is here for but one thing -- to eat my birds or little animals, and I hunt him relentlessly. The dogs welcome a snake with shrieks of glee, and, in an instant's activity too rapid to follow, kill it without leaving a toothmark upon it.

There were many large blacksnakes here at first, but few since, until this spring. Several weeks ago, as the young birds became audible in