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# JUNIOR NATURALISTS

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## WHO . . . WHO . . . KNOWS . . . ?

Tamara Klinger, grade 8, Sedley, wrote to Dr. Stuart Houston the following letter about owls. Read it carefully so you can answer the questions at the end . . .

Hi! My name is Tamara Klinger and I am an 8th grade student and I live on a farm near Sedley, Saskatchewan.

For about seven years, we have had Great Horned Owls nesting on our farm, in very good view of my bedroom window. I have watched them closely almost every day, which has been a wonderful experience.

After roughly the first four years of nesting, the family moved to a second

nest, one still easily seen. There they lived quite happily until the year before last, 1980, when the nest became so dilapidated that one chick fell out onto a branch below, when the side of the nest fell down. The mother owl had to fly down there every day and feed it.

The next year, having learnt their lesson, the whole troop (by now there were quite a lot of them), moved over to our neighbours to nest. A few times they returned to perch in our garden, but never in that nest.

This year, I was shocked to see one of the dumb 1980 owls nesting in our old dilapidated nest! I know it's her; when you watch them grow up, you can tell them apart later. You wouldn't think she would be so dumb, after seeing



*Great Horned Owl on nest*

Gary Seib

Blue Jay

her brother fall out of that nest. When it happened, she stayed pressed against the opposite edge of the nest for days. She wouldn't even go to the middle of the nest — but here she is again! Furthermore, the nest is now even more dilapidated, with only half its sticks left; but I know she laid her eggs there. She won't leave the nest to eat, or fly, more than once a day, unless you come within two feet of the tree.

The owl chicks that hatch there this year will have to have claws of Crazy Glue to stay on the nest.

Since hawks build the nests that owls use, and since humans are smarter than hawks, I wondered whether someone could come to repair this nest. The nest is only about five meters above the ground.

We desperately want to keep this owl family here, because unless they are here, all our corn gets eaten by other birds. When an owl is here, it scares those birds away.

Often we hear the owls hoot strange melodies, like chants. Once before a gigantic storm, we saw them gather and dance, with their wings outstretched, on a field. Sometimes at night the owls walk across our roof.

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What kind (species) of owl is Tamara referring to?

Do they build their own nests?

Are the owls useful?

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And here is what Stuart Houston had to suggest: "You and your Dad or friends should be able to arrange a salvage operation yourselves. All you need is a wooden box or metal tub, which can be fastened into a fork of a tree five or more feet above the ground, out of the reach of coyotes. Fill it full of sticks and place the young owls in it, and the mother owl will move to the new site and begin feeding and sheltering them at once. We've never had it fail.

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Thanks again for writing, and thanks

for your interest in owls. Not everyone is clever enough to realize that owls have their good points, and have their place in nature's scheme of things."

I hope that this suggestion will be useful for many of you who may see the need for repairing an owl nest.

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On the other hand, the need for repair did not seem as urgent as first thought. Here is what Tamara wrote back: "... By the time Stuart Houston's letter came with instructions on what to do, one chick had flown and the other was practising flying ... Thank you for caring about the owls."

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Great Horned Owls are only 1 of 11 (!) regular species of owls present in Saskatchewan. They are the ones we see and hear the most often as they nest near where we live, in our farmyards and aspen bluffs, as well as in the northern forest. Other owls nest in southern Saskatchewan. Which ones nest in the prairie? (2 species) ... in bluffs, farmyards and coulees? (3 species).

## BIRD IDENTIFICATION

The birds in the photographs in the September issue were as follows:

1. Mallard,
2. Canada Goose,
3. Red-Winged Blackbird,
4. House Sparrow,
5. American Robin,
6. Mourning Dove,
7. Kildeer,
8. American Coot,
9. Lesser Scaup,
10. Sharp-tailed Grouse.

We unfortunately did not get any class entry but our winner for the individual entries is: Warren Anderson, Box 113, Perdue, Saskatchewan. Warren is 11 years old and is in grade 6 at Perdue School. His identifications are all good except No. 9, which he identified as a Canvasback. He still wins a guide to bird identification. Congratulations, Warren, and I hope that you will keep up your interest in birds. — Paule B. Hjertaas, 919 Cook Cres., Regina, Saskatchewan. S4X 2L9.