

Willow Whispers



Our wildlife habitat areas are one of Willow Valley's best-kept secrets. This land is home to lush natural meadows, wetlands, woods and breathtaking views of the bucolic countryside. Right now, mallard ducks and Canada geese are settling into the ponds for the summer. Red-winged blackbirds sing their distinctive gurgling "oak-a-lee." song. Great blue herons often sweep in to feed in shallow pools. A fusion of fowl—red-tailed hawks, bluebirds, bitterns, and great horned owls do daily flybys. Muskrats feed on

cattail roots and crayfish as they swim along the stream banks.

The natural beauty, ecological diversity and varied wildlife habitat for foxes, raccoons, possums, and even the occasional passing deer make walking through our grounds an unforgettable experience. It's not too often that one walks our grounds without feeling a sense of peace.

Recently, Willow Valley Residents and Team Members witnessed the birth of a great horned owl family. Dick Scribner,

a Willow Valley Resident and photographer, recorded their magical maturity over a six-month period. I am delighted to share his eloquent article, "The Owl Chronicles", on page eight of this issue. Mother Nature offers a bounty of treasures waiting to be discovered—take her up on the offer.

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Photo courtesy of Dick Scribner

The Owl Chronicles

by Dick Scribner, Willow Valley Resident



November 26: A great horned owl sits high in a pine tree in the Willow Valley woods. He ignores me, until I hiss like a snake – then looks down and is caught with 300 mm lens.

March 14: A neighbor calls to report she saw three baby owls fall from a tree at the edge of the woods. Looks like their stick nest collapsed.

March 16: Mother brings rabbit pieces regularly. She now sits for hours with chicks under her wings.

March 17: Three chicks still under her wings. She is covered in ice and deep in snow. She barely moves, but stares at me with big owl eyes.

March 22: Word spreads around Willow Valley. Residents and ground crews work together to rope off the area and put up “Do not mow” signs.



swooping down from a nearby tree, talons out front, mixing it up with the male goose closest to the chicks. Great flurry of wings around the tree, owl on goose’s back. Both geese are out of there.

April 12: At sundown the two remaining chicks are hopping around more than I have ever seen in the day. They venture up to about 20 feet from home at the base of the tree, maybe further as night goes on.

April 13: After a night out on the town, the two siblings are back next to the tree, sleeping, nodding, and cuddling each other.

April 23: The fledglings have both fuzz and feathers at this stage of life. They sit in a tree about 20 feet off the ground, so we know the feathers have developed to the point where they can fly at least a little. In one or two weeks they should be able to achieve sustained flight and fly off.

March 29: Arriving to visit her chicks, mother comes in low and fast, miraculously weaving between close-spaced trees.

April 10: Tri-colored cat looks back over his shoulder as if retreating from something, perhaps the nesting Canada geese. The geese stand between the cat and the owls.

Geese exhibit mindless hostility toward every other creature in the area, even other geese, and the helpless owlets upon whom they threaten with loud honking and out-stretched necks.

But the geese may in effect be protecting the owls from their most deadly enemy, the cat.

April 11: Geese move down the embankment, honking and closing in on the little owls. Adult owl comes



All photos are courtesy of Dick Scribner.