

11.27.1975

Leaves continued to resist the arrival of winter. Along the rivers, tall pecans stand gilded into mixtures of reds and greens. Winter grass covers the bottoms. Herders crippled by the cow disaster see strong promises of a good winter.

Near my desk window blue quail feed back and forth under the yard fence. Two peacocks keep the quail on guard. The master of the covey stretches full height to watch for the stealth of a mother cat that hunts his protectorate as her species have hunted birds throughout time.

In the left foreground, under the pecan trees, a fox squirrel husks a green nut. He sits on his hindlegs, spitting the peelings on the ground. He too must watch for the cats. Cats are great hunters. You do know that they can lift their claws to creep soundlessly through dry leaves, don't you?

To the right, late migrating mourning doves land on the fence. One is a cock; the plumage around his neckline is a brilliant scale of flamingo alternating with blacks. Yesterday, the cat came in with a dead dove for her kittens. Cats are ruthless killers. The cat family is unmatched in nature for the will to feed their young and themselves.

Two hummingbirds lived in the yard during the summer. I once freed a hummingbird that was entrapped on a screen porch. I never shall forget how, when I closed my hand around his body, no space was required to protect him.

Close your fist, if you will please. Not much room, is there? Less than the inside of a closed fist makes more sense to me than the meters and fractions that the bird watchers use.

I had to remove the bird bath from the yard. Birds are messy bathers. Like kids, they do more splashing than washing. Sparrows leave a ring around the tub that'll outdo a public bath. Wrens like to drink after they've bathed. And mockingbirds. Mockingbirds think they'll catch pneumonia unless they squawk around telling the world what a fine bath they just had. Lots of states fuss about wanting mockingbirds for their state bird. I read an old lady who claimed that the mockingbirds in her yard learned to sing arias from the opera. States and old ladies ought to try them out at a bird bath. They'd think symbols and arias. I grew tired of cleaning up the white paint. I wouldn't have felt any different if one of them had a state flag on his wing and could sing better than Maria Callas.

Audubon and other artists made smart alecs out of the birds. We have a cardinal summering here who pecks his reflection in the window panes. His ego is so overcharged that he thinks he's the only red bird that has permission to use the yard.

The morning after the bird bath was moved, he'd dive at the window until I hoped the old cat would have smashed cardinal for lunch. One missed bath is no excuse for an aerial tantrum. August is a still month. I've seen the time when we were so short on windmill weather that the purpose of bath powder was stretched past what a professional fumigator expects from his work.

Birds or nature clubs don't own the patent on the earth. I watched the great grandfathers of these animals in this same front yard. Dominion of the premises is settled in my book. No upstart cardinal or tennis shoe wearing kid is going to change that fact. I

may have to peck the window panes to cure the frustrations, but I don't want to hear that the love of nature was invented in 1975.

Last night, a magazine advertisement showed a sheepman trudging off in a wool lined coat, carrying a rifle. Implications were that the clod was off to an eagle shoot or bound for running a long trapline. Herds do own guns and traps. We also have lots to eat and some sense.

No doubt the sovereignty of nature is changing hands. In a couple of decades, all food may have to come from words.