

SHELL SHOCKED

The Great Horned Owl and the Hawk

By Art Stevens

Did you know that the Great Horned Owl doesn't make its own nest but uses those built by such other birds as ospreys, hawks and eagles?

So it appears that our Great Horned Owl is nothing more than a squatter. And my question is if this owl expropriates nests built by other birds, is it assumed that these birds authorize use of their nests in advance? Do they charge rent or are they blissfully unaware that their nests are being occupied by owls while they're away?

Can you imagine the scene that could take place when a hawk returns from a hunting trip with a fish in its beak only to find that there's an uninvited guest – a Great Horned Owl lounging in its nest?

HAWK: It's you again. Haven't I told you that I didn't want to find you here when I got back? Don't I have enough to do sautéing this fish and trying out a new Martha Stewart recipe without your intruding into my home?

OWL: I thought you said you'd be away longer. Don't you normally need to fly great distances to find fish you like?

HAWK: Don't you go trying to pander to me. This is my nest. I built it with my own two wings and my beak. It's a good thing I'm an empty nester with my kids having moved to Sarasota and all. Otherwise, I would have to do something drastic to you like poke your eyes out.

OWL: Now let's not get belligerent. You know that my species doesn't build its own nests. I simply borrowed yours while you were away.

HAWK: Borrowed? Did I authorize you to "borrow" my nest? Did we ever have a single conversation about it? Never. Do I need to put a padlock on my nest to keep you out?

OWL: You seem to forget that I take good care of your nest while you're on your hunting trips. I feed the worms and eat the insects before they spoil. I pay you back in trade.

HAWK: Why don't you build your own nests like us hawks, or ospreys or eagles? Why should you live off our hard work? Go apply for welfare.

OWL: Look, I didn't create our species. I'm just a member of it. Our species has never – read my lips – never built a nest. I wouldn't even know where to begin. I can't even hammer a nail into a wall. Our species was designed to be mysterious and live in other birds' nests. I admit it's sometimes tough to find nests to occupy when you other birds sit around your nests all day long like lounge lizards. You should get more exercise.

HAWK: So it's my responsibility to provide housing for you because of your species' shortcomings? Why don't you live in a lion's den instead?

OWL: Very funny. Now you're being silly and irrational. We owls live in nests not some creepy places like a lion's den. For that matter why don't you just suggest we move in with humans?

HAWK: You and I know full well that a human would throw you out the moment you start your silly owl call. Why can't you owls be more sing song like other birds?

OWL: That's it. I've had enough of your insults. I'm packing my things. I know of an osprey nearby who's visiting his mother in Ding Darling. I'll just move into her nest.

HAWK: Well, good riddance, if you ask me. And don't think about coming back. I don't want to find you here when I come back from my upcoming flight to Chicago. They have great fish in Lake Michigan and no, I'm not inviting you for dinner when I get back.

OWL: That's fine with me. You won't be seeing me anymore. Oh, one last thing before I fly off.

HAWK: What?

OWL: Would you be kind enough to forward my L. L. Bean catalogues to my osprey nest?