

“Owl Pacino” Dropped By

By John Clarke

Over the past few weeks, we have been serenaded for a good portion of the night by an owl of unknown species. The sound of this bird resonates around our canal-side home on Hopper’s Hideaway cove. Suddenly, one evening in early March, out of nowhere a large owl landed on a branch in one of our tall pine trees. We could make out its horned tufts of feathers on its ears, but it was largely hidden among the branches and needles of the trees. I ran to fetch the binoculars for a closer look and was amazed at the majesty of this bird. We were sent to the internet to begin to confirm what we had just witnessed and learned that indeed it was a great horned owl.

We continued to hear the pleasant evening and early morning rap but did not see it again. On the first nice evening in April that we felt comfortable sitting outside to enjoy the weather, we were surprised by our dog Millie running to one side of the deck to investigate something. At first, we assumed it must be someone walking their dog, but she stood motionless—and it is unusual for her not to bark at would-be



Juvenile great horned owl—Photo by John Clarke

trespassers. Her stance provoked us to go see what she had spotted, and it was a beautiful white-feathered owl standing perfectly still and looking back at me. I rushed to grab my phone for a photo. Thankfully Millie did not start barking, and I was able to snap the photo here.

We recalled that we and our grandchildren had attended a couple of presentations at the local aquarium on birds and one on owls. I called the aquarium and asked to be connected to the resident expert on owls. She was not available when I called, but, thanks to Facebook, we were able to connect and chat about the photo. Amanda Goble offered up a wealth of information about our little friend. The white fluff of feathers was the identifying feature that told her it was a juvenile great horned owl. These adult birds can be a cinnamon blend in color or more white, but the large owl we saw was dark cinnamon. I have never seen an owl in the wild, and seeing the juvenile up close was very exciting.

Ms. Goble told us that the juveniles have a long dependence period and like to stay with the parents, so that means we will most likely see mom and dad out and about as well.

I feel pretty embarrassed that I have not yet installed our owl house that was a handmade gift from Anne’s college roommate and childhood friend from Raleigh. There are mixed reviews on how to face the house, whether to the north or south. The owl likes to have a nice glide path when landing, so we are going to face it to the north as it can glide in from the canal. The only issue is mounting it high enough, which I think we can do with my ladder. What an environment we have here in Pine Knoll Shores—dolphins, whales, ospreys, owls and even more.

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