

## **Plea to roadkill: stay on the road**

*Marsha Henry Goff*

Silly me! I always thought if I drove all over town with a humongous defunct owl dangling by one foot from my car's grille that someone would honk and tell me.

Well, sure, I knew I hit something as I was driving down the highway at a legal 55 mph. My peripheral vision detected a brown blur approaching the car from the right and the collision of critter and car was so loud I first thought I had hit a deer ... until I saw a big wing draped over the hood of the car. I pulled onto an intersecting road and the wing disappeared causing me to think the bird had fallen off. I knew that nothing smaller than an elephant (thank goodness they stay off the highways) could survive that collision and, because the critter was clearly as dead as the long-deceased parrot of Monty Python fame, I drove on, privately mourning my avian victim.

I visited my mother-in-law, then stopped at a grocery store where I decided to check the car to see if it had damage. Imagine my shock to find a huge owl hanging from the grille. I gingerly took hold of its tail feathers and tried to dislodge it. No luck, it's foot was wedged tight.

When I came back to the car with a cart full of groceries, I looked to make sure the owl was still there. What made me think someone might take the owl is a mystery to me, but I was both relieved and chagrined to find it where I left it. If you think it is difficult to realise you have unknowingly driven around town with a dead owl hanging from your car, imagine how much worse it is to have that knowledge and

envision approaching drivers saying to their passengers, “I wonder why she’s got that big bird hanging from her car?”

Then, too, I was afraid if it fell off that I might run over it (yeah, like I could do it any more damage). Not to worry. It stayed firmly attached during the drive home and was delivered intact to our garage. I opened the door into the house and told husband Ray I needed his help. He walked right past the front of the car, opened the back door and began removing sacks of groceries.

“Not that,” I said, “here’s what I need help with.”

I missed a great Kodak moment when Ray saw the owl. He was speechless. I wasn’t. “You know how, when you accidentally hit a critter, you leave it in the road as roadkill? Well, not me. I give it a nice long ride and bring it home.”

Laid out on the garage floor, the owl measured 20 inches from head to tail. He hadn’t a mark on him so at least his death was quick and bloodless. Ray diagnosed him with a broken neck. “He sure is pretty,” I said.

“Uh-huh,” Ray agreed, “pretty dead.”

“Well, he’s too pretty to leave out for the coyotes. Tomorrow I’ll call the natural history museum or some taxidermists and see if they want him.”

“Do you want to have him stuffed and keep him?” Ray asked.

“What? You think I want a reminder of killing that beautiful creature? No thanks.”

I quickly learned that Saturday is not a good day to give away a dead owl. There was no answer at the museum so I finally reached a taxidermist and offered the owl to him. “I’d love to take him,” he said, “but I can’t. They’re federally protected.”

“Well,” I said, “this one no longer requires protection.”

On Sunday, I reached a museum ornithologist at his home. I thought I had bagged a barn owl because he had no ears, but when I described him to the bird guy, he said, “No, what you have is a barred owl. We get them all the time. If you had a barn owl, I’d be out there in a flash.”

So I told Ray that we couldn’t have the owl decomposing in the garage and he might as well take him far from our house and leave him for the coyotes. I retreated to my computer and was playing Minesweeper when I heard a knock on the window of my little home office. There stood Ray, holding the owl and slowly waving its wing at me in farewell.

If you should ever see me driving around town with an owl hanging from my car, will you please apprise me of that fact? And if it’s a barn owl, you’ll save me trouble if you’ll call the ornithologist. Tell him I’ve finally got one he can use.