

Wild Things Have Friend And Enjoy Life In His 'Jungle'

By Margaret Koch

It's Just A Natural Mistake

People aren't the only things that live in Santa Cruz county.

Every once in a while a small, furry figure scurries in front of the car headlights at night or the bushes part to give a quick glimpse of a non-human resident.

The bushes have parted rather regularly — and profitably for the wild animal population — in what Dr. Oliver J. Lee terms "the jungle" area between his garden at 136 Fairview place and Wood's lagoon. Neatly fenced, but bounded by a strip of tangled tree and brush-grown property at the lagoon shore, Lee's yard with its fruit trees and berry bushes practically wears a "welcome sign."

And with his "wild neighbors" having the run of his place, the white-haired retired professor of astronomy has decided to ignore the stare to take a better look at earthlings.

"Here we are — surrounded by houses, almost in the middle of civilization, yet we have all these interesting wild creatures coming right into the yard," Lee commented.

"Even the robins gather here to eat our cotoneaster red berries," added the former director emeritus of Dearborn observatory at Northwestern university. Listed in "Who's Who," "American Men of Science," and "Who Knows and What," Dr. Lee has started a private "who's who" of his own nature observations.

"Have you ever heard a raccoon sing?" he asked. It seems that after they feast on whatever's handy in the garden the small gray fur bandits retire to the safety of nearby trees where they "hum" contentedly.

Raccoons have eaten Lee's and his neighbors' vegetables, also pulling up and destroying what they didn't devour. Last year raccoons grew so bold that one of the neighbors called the county trapper who — temporarily — put an end to the nightly invasions.

"This year an opossum with a taste for peaches stripped our tree," Dr. Lee related rather sadly. "He did leave the peach pits."

Peach-loving 'possums are in for a surprise next year, however. Dr. Lee has erected a protective wire barrier around the tree because he and Mrs. Lee are fond of peaches too.

This month Lee is going to let the animals help themselves to a second crop of plums now ripening unseasonably on the tree in his yard.

"Not much I can do about keeping them out anyway," he said, "unless I want to build a wire cage for the tree."



Dr. Oliver J. Lee of 136 Fairview place inspects his plum tree which will furnish a Thanksgiving dinner of "out-of-

season" fruit this year for the small wild animals inhabiting his Wood's Lagoon neighborhood. The author of two books on astronomy and a retired pro-

fessor of Northwestern university, Dr. Lee calls the confused plum tree an "astronomical faux pas."

The Lee property also has been visited by deer, rabbits, squirrels, snakes, lizards, quail, barn owls, bluejays, humming birds and many other kinds of birds too fleet to identify.

The broad sweep of the lagoon itself serves as convention headquarters for fall and spring migrations of ducks and shore birds; a loon, or bittern, makes it his home; herons stop there and even pelicans find it restful.

California's official state bird, the quail, is Lee's favorite garden guest, and the fluffy new quail chicks his favorite sight.

"They are about the size of walnuts and you should see them hurry to hide when father quail sounds the warning," explained Lee. "He sits on a high post or limb where he can guard the flock while they search around the garden paths."

He also noted that he does not feed the quail as he feels it un-

wise to interfere with nature's plan.

As much as he enjoys seeing the wild creatures free, Lee recently helped a friend trap bluejays.

But it was for a good reason — to band them and turn them loose again.

"The bluejay is one of the wariest and most suspicious of birds," Lee said, adding that his friend had tried for several years with no luck to band a jay.

"I built several traps — the kind with doors that fall shut — and put them out in the yard," Lee said. "We left them open there for weeks and gradually the bluejays became accustomed to

eating in them. Then one day my friend and I arranged the doors so they would fall shut, sat and waited, and in less than an hour we had caught six jays. He put the little bird-banders' bracelets on them and we turned them free."

We asked Dr. Lee if he thought the proposed yacht harbor development in Wood's lagoon would change all this fraternizing of man and animal in the Twin Lakes area.

"I hope not, but that's a long way off yet with many property transactions to take place first," answered, pointing out that he actually owns a small piece of the lake bordering his property.

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