

I Killed A Crow

Having been born to a tradition of recreational hunting, I fell easily into a pattern of treating the creatures of the wild as objects to be sacrificed for my pleasure—even while admiring them for their beauty and wondrous behavior. I had to learn, over and over again, that this ambivalence of attitude must be resolved. In time, I was to understand the simple truth in the words of Prince Charles “In the end we must, I think, somehow conclude that the animals have as much right to this planet as we have.”

Succumbing to a feckless adolescent need to do something—anything—to pass the idle hours, I took my gun in hand one fall afternoon and browsed the back wood near the marsh line. I heard a noisy pack of crows in the distance, called one into range and shot him. I had employed a well-known sportsman’s trick, simulating the call of a hungry nestling. To this high-pitched nasal sound, an adult crow will almost invariably respond if it is in the general area. When the unsuspecting crow got within 50 ft. at treetop level, I fired away and down he came, flapping wildly with one broken wing. The crow landed heavily 10 ft. in front of me, lay stunned briefly, and then took off noisily through the cabbage palmettos. I did not have another small shot, so gave chase and caught the bird, pinned both wings to the body and lifted it off the ground. Using a dart-like beak and surprisingly strong clawing feet with telling effect on my hands, the crow tried desperately to free itself. Suddenly, as if realizing there was no escape, it stopped struggling, cocked its head to the left as if seeking my face. For the briefest moment, bird and I were locked in silent communication. The fright and defiance in that unblinking brown orb was gone. It seemed only to ask the question “Why?”

I had gone too far to turn back now. With terrible resolve, I stepped over to a pine sapling and, in a two-handed motion as if swinging an axe, I bludgeoned the bird’s head against the tree...once...twice, and felt its life shiver away into my bare hands. I threw the lifeless body into the brush. Five minutes ago, he had been the proud assertive sentinel of the flock, glossy purple in the autumn sun. Now the carrion eaters would pick the bones, the maggots and ants would take the rest.

I picked up my gun and stole quickly away, knowing full well that what I had done was needless, utterly stupid, and an affront to my instincts as a rational human being.

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— Prince Charles

Wildcat

With 14-year-old exuberance, I accepted into my care the wildcat (bobcat) that had been trapped in the nearby woods and brought to the house snarling and hissing. He had fallen victim to a program to rid the plantation of wildcats, on the grounds that they were a major menace to the quail population. The unhappy cat was transferred from the small trap/cage in which he was captured, to a larger cage about 3’ x 3’ x 6’ in size. I was delighted to have—for my very own—such a beautiful animal, and immediately fancied him to be the centerpiece of the many attractions I would show my friends from school when they might visit my Mackay Point wonderland. I was confident that, in a short time, the wildcat would become assured of my good intentions and we would be friends—sort of.

I faithfully provided for the animal’s needs of food and shelter. He got fresh meat whenever possible or leftovers such as chicken and venison from family meals. About once a week, I walked the various paths near the house at dusk with a shotgun and usually brought back a rabbit for him. Several times when I could not easily find a rabbit, and to Momma’s great distress, I killed a white or blue heron, which I would throw into the cage, feathers and all. He ate heron, though not as readily as he did rabbit.

After nearly a year of such attention to my wildcat, I could not see the slightest change in his disposition. Every approach to his cage prompted an angry snarl and a baring of teeth. Keeping him in fresh meat had become burdensome, and the onerous task of maintaining his cage free enough of fly-attracting carrion fell increasingly short of Momma’s expectations. I finally decided that my untamed wildcat had to go.