

HILLTOPPER

Ralph Perkins & Joan Ebbeson, editors
Ann Paulson & Jan Hostage,
photographers

Please send news, views and photos to
rlphprkns@yahoo.com or to mailbox #1.

COMING EVENTS

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9*

3 P.M. Hilltop House

"2 x 2" Listen to a world music performance by two couples (Valerie Kosednar and Marc Grieco, together with Betsy and Lee Rybeck Lynd). They are known for their broad range of styles and repertoire, including traditional and contemporary folksongs from around the globe. Stay for a social hour with friends and neighbors. Please BYOB and an appetizer.

SATURDAY, MARCH 21

NOON Hilltop House

ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON

"Movie Characters" will be the theme, so start thinking about costumes (if you choose) and about enjoying a sit-down, catered meal with your Hilltop neighbors. Look for more details in the March Hilltopper.



*** PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DAY
AND TIME!**



The Secret Life of Hilltop's Indoor Cats

Dogs strolling with their human companions are a familiar and beloved sight around Hilltop. Largely unseen, but just as valued by their owners, is another population: indoor cats. These pets spend their whole lives inside the home, in turn entertaining and comforting their human "besties." Just how many live at Hilltop is not known because, as stay-at-homes, they leave such a small footprint (oops - make that pawprint).

Advantages of an indoor cat are many: No fleas or ticks brought inside; no birds attacked at the feeder; no digging in the garden; no late night walks with a flashlight to find a missing pet. There are also advantages for the animal itself, as the indoor lifestyle eliminates exposure to traffic, pesticides and other toxics, aggressive other pets and predators. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) recommends keeping cats indoors and reports that, statistically, indoor cats live longer.

How do they spend their time? Activities include playing with catnip mice and other toys, scratching (on their scratching posts and not the furniture - fingers crossed), stalking the robot vac, sprinting up and down the hall, hunting spiders, and their favorite (after cat naps and yoga) - bird-watching.

**"What greater gift than the love
of a cat?" — Charles Dickens**

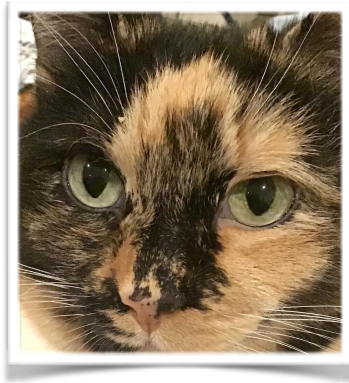
Ralph's Field Notes: Who Cooks for You All?

I planned to write about something else this month, but Joan witnessed an interesting event the other day - in Hannaford's parking lot, of all places - that changed my mind: a Barred Owl perched on a signpost and it wasn't gonna move for nobody, including the crowd talking and taking selfies just a few feet away.

Some of NH's eleven kinds of owls may be seen and/or heard in or near Hilltop on many nights. But some, like the Great Grey Owl and the Snowy Owl are driven south by lack of prey and are hungry enough to hunt during the day. Surprisingly, the best Snowy Owl viewing I ever found was at Boston's Logan Airport. Plenty of long views there, and the birds seem to quickly forget the noise. I've seen as many as eight there at once!

All animals and plants have adaptations to where and how they live, but owls' are interesting and obvious. It looks like an owl can rotate its head completely around, but it can't; it goes about halfway around, then whips the opposite way so fast that you might miss it.

In a class I once took, we were taught that totally blindfolded owls could catch mice solely by hearing. To help accomplish this, their ears are at different locations on their heads and may also be of different shapes. Those ear "tufts" of many species apparently have nothing to do with hearing, but nobody knows what they really do. Some guesses are they help scare off predators, help owls recognize each other in dim light, or help camouflage the birds to make them look like a rough tree stump or snag.



More Indoor Cats

Above left to right, Shmooshie, Unit 1; Kit, Unit 136. At right, Lila, Unit 19. Shown on page 1 is Shiloh, Unit 13. Photos were taken by cat owners.



New Neighbors Soon

Anita and Michael Tuttle have purchased and will soon move to Unit 75. The Tuttles are moving here from South Burlington, VT. They're not exactly strangers; Michael's mom, Martha, used to reside in Unit 61.

As you might expect, owls have extremely good eyesight. Reportedly, they have been known to find a mouse in an auditorium lit by a single candle! Rather than round eyeballs, theirs are tubelike and anchored to the skull bones. This is why they can't move their eyes, and they have adapted by being able to turn their heads. They also have many other visual adaptations. As a kid, I fed the animals after the Audubon campers left at summer's end. One of my "charges" was a Great Horned Owl that, when I approached its pen with food, bobbed and weaved its entire body to see me better. I later observed this behavior in wild owls.

I haven't touched upon about a zillion other owly things, like their silent flight, the weird nesting (starting here as early as January!), how some attack skunks, what owl pellets are, their strange incubation of eggs, or why winter invasions occur.

Owls are symbols of wisdom on the one hand, but of impending death or evil on the other. In fact, they seem to be not the brightest stars in the bird galaxy, as they are notoriously hard to train to speak or to do tasks. Despite that, a group of owls is called - and wait for it - a Court, a Parliament and other stately and wise things.

By the way, in case you missed it, "who cooks for you all" is what the bird guides tell us is the sound of the Barred Owl's call.

