

Watch, listen how animals warn each other of danger

NATURE TRAILS



TIMOTHY NOWICKI

Interacting with other individuals

Communication is a very important part of human society. In recent years humankind has greatly improved the ability to communicate with the advent of radio, television, computers, FAX and the telephone.

als is helpful to both parties and especially to an injured person. Animals also communicate with each other. Songs sung in spring are ways to get two individuals of the opposite sex together, and also to keep other males of the same species away. Call notes of birds are used to keep in contact with others and to alert others of danger.

Just recently I was visiting Timberlands, a Michigan Nature Association preserve in northern Oakland County and experienced

an example of how animals warn each other of danger.

I had stopped in a section of beautiful beech-maple forest to try and spot a woodpecker I could hear excavating for food. There were some other sounds from the forest but everything seemed calm. Then I heard the forceful sound of a chipmunk. When I turned in the direction of the sound I saw a hawk fly down the pipeline clearing. The sound of the woodpecker had also stopped. After a few moments, when the

hawk was out of harm's way, another sound came from the chipmunk and the excavations of the woodpecker began again.

This interspecies communication is not unusual. Warning calls of birds are recognized by other species of birds. Different calls can be given by a species to mean something different.

For instance, if a bird finds a stationary predator it will alert others with a call that can be easily located. If the predator is moving however, the alarm call given

is easily heard, but not easily located. That is because the bird giving the warning does not want to be located by the predator, yet it has warned others of danger nearby.

A mammal, called the California ground squirrel, is able to communicate the kind of danger to others with audible range. California ground squirrels have one warning call that alerts others of a hawk or bird of prey approaching from the sky. Another alarm call designates a

rattlesnake is approaching, and a third different alarm call indicates that a mammal predator is approaching.

As you watch birds at your feeders you will probably notice them all scatter and fly away at once. That is a good indicator that an alarm call was given warning others to seek cover. This happened in my yard once, and even the fox squirrel was seen on the lee side of a tree from the corner's hawk that flew in to take a look.



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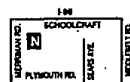
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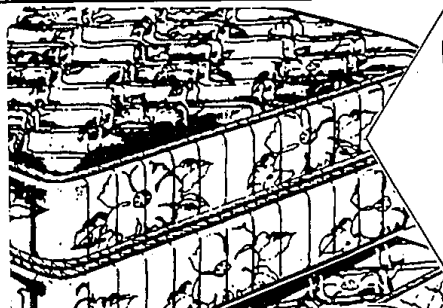
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