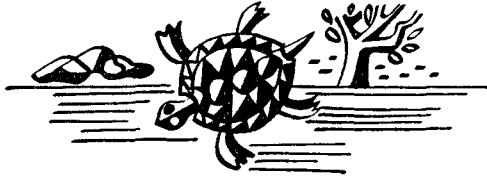

DOWN TO EARTH

by ALAN DEVOE



THE FLYING SQUIRREL

WE HUMAN beings are not a very noticing lot. The sun comes up in a blinding magnificence and we don't see it. Our mind is on a stock quotation. The moon sails over, lovely as hope and enigmatic as death. The moon? The moon? Oh; oh yes; sorry; we were lost in the last chapter of *The Corpse in the Cyclotron*. Birds sing; fields blaze with blossom; forests lie stretching superb across the hills. Eh? Hmm? What was that again? Sorry; I wasn't noticing. It is scarcely surprising that every now and then some poet or prophet among us is driven mad by our thick apathy.

One consequence of our everlasting inward-turning and oblivion is the easy forgetting of what a small part of the populace we are. Indeed we are something less than small. It is more accurate to call us tiny. We are one kind of animal, one creaturely species, among far more than a million species.

It may be necessary for an insect to sting us to make us notice its existence; but in fact, in the view of a biologist, this is the *Age of Insects*. There are more than eight hundred thousand different species of the creatures. Their individual numbers are beyond computing. We are one mammal. There are easily eight thousand other species of fellow mammals of ours, born under the same sun, living their mammalian lives while we live ours, dying and decaying into the same earth that waits for us all. To have our attention centered, as we mostly do, exclusively upon the human animal and its performances, is to be looking at no more than one microscopic portion of the stunning earth-scene. It is to be missing most of the show.

The show goes on, by day and by night, in every hour and moment, everywhere. With a little self-training, we can learn to be awake to its more evident splendors. We can en-

rich and enlarge our aliveness by cultivating the habit of "taking in," along with the morning newspaper headlines, the fact of the sun, the fact of the grass, the fact of birds and blooms and the chipmunk on the terrace.

To do that much is to go a long way in arousement and increase. Then, after that, we may be led into a growing consciousness of the less colorful and evident creatures around us: the silent insects thronging a square yard of grass around our summer lawn-chair, the shyer birds that keep to the green quiet of dense trees. Our world of realization gets bigger and bigger. Why, this place in which we had thought ourselves alone is fairly *teeming* with fellow creatures. We may learn to notice the tunnels of field-mice, and find out—it is a pretty staggering thing to find out—that in one ten-acre field, drowsing "lifeless" under the hot August sun, the meadow mice may easily number a thousand. With every increase in our awareness, we discover the existence of more and more kinds of fellow animals, which had been living close to us all the while without our knowing it . . . animals watching us stealthily from behind trees, animals scuttling away into the concealing grass as our footstep approaches, animals hiding themselves by guile, camouflage, trickery. We find that

the world, if ever we wake up to it, is a densely thronged place. Millions of lives are going on around us. Millions of eyes are watching us.

Even if we "come alive" to nature as fully as we can, there still remain innumerable creaturely lives that continue invisible to us. For instance: Do you see many rattlesnakes and copperheads in your neighborhood? Not many? None at all? It is no assurance that the snakes are not there. The eyes of these snakes have elliptical pupils, instead of round ones like the eyes of familiar garter-snakes. It is because they like to creep forth at night. While we sleep, there may be many a slithering rustle in the grass and withered leaves. The day comes; the snakes withdraw; we think they are not there. Or again: Have you seen many flying squirrels? No? Never? The chances are strong that they abound where you live. We may get to know the gray squirrels easily enough, and the red squirrels and chipmunks. But *flying* squirrels? They are right here, around us. But they live secretly. They live in the night. They may well stand as representative of many and many a kind of creature which companions us in numbers, but which we never see, or realize exists at all, unless we take to nature the kind of intense scrutiny which ordinarily we reserve for ourselves and our small world of the human.

II

A flying squirrel looks rather like an oversized mouse with a furry, flattened tail. Big-eyed and big-eared, it wears a coat of extraordinarily soft velvety fur, fawn-brown above and spotlessly creamy-white below, the demarcation line of the two colors being as sharp and clear as though painted. To look at a flying squirrel closely — an experience coming to perhaps one human being in a million — is to see that the sharp line is in fact made by a fold of the squirrel's skin. From forelegs to hind legs extends a broad web. A flying squirrel under close examination generally rolls itself into a ball; but if it can be induced to extend its legs, it becomes apparent that the spread membrane equips the little mammal with something very like a pair of glider-wings.

We are always touched by the endearing qualities of animals that are soft-furred and gently innocent. *Ooohs* and *aaahs* sweep movie-houses when fawns are shown on the screen. We are all moved by little kittens. Of all the mammals in the world, none has this quality more strongly than *Glaucomys volans*, the flying squirrel. The little creature is as soft to the touch as chinchilla. It is as shy as an elf, and as endlessly playful as one. It is so gentle that it can scarcely be induced to bite by any provocation, though it

has formidable teeth. It is habitually immaculate, from its spruce whiskers to the pink soles of its delicate little feet. A flying squirrel is a fairy-tale squirrel, the warm and sweet little creature of a child's happy dream. (A naturalist does not lightly use language of this unabashedly sentimental sort. A flying squirrel compels him to it.)

An observer might study a countryside intently all his days and never see a flying squirrel. Appropriately and elvishly enough, the squirrels stay hidden by day in their hollow trees. They are gregarious by nature, and a dozen or more of them may live together in one old stump. When night comes down, they rouse up, squeaking and chirruping, and set out to feed and play.

The way of a flying squirrel is this: Emerging from its tree-hollow in the darkness — but not a darkness to *it*, for its bright eyes are as designed for night-seeing as an owl's — the squirrel scampers to the very top of the tree. It makes its way to the tip of the uppermost twig that will hold it. It picks out another tree perhaps twenty or thirty feet away. It launches itself into the air, spreading its four legs as wide as they will go and stretching out its flattened tail as an additional aerial balancer.

Strictly speaking, a flying squirrel cannot fly. What it can do is glide.

Soaring like a falling leaf, it sails downward from the top of the launching-tree to the base of the next tree. With a quick scrabble it scampers to the top of *that* tree, picks out another one, and again leaps into a swooping glide.

How far can it sail? At least a hundred and fifty feet, probably more. Gliding, it always loses some altitude. It always lands at a point lower than its starting place. But when the launching-tree is a very high one, the little squirrel can sail an astonishing distance before it must make a landing.

Few of us can see much on a dark night. Our night vision has weakened in the way of so many others of our animal senses. But with practice (and Vitamin A) we can re-acquire a good deal of it. If we do so, and if we extend our nature scrutiny to include a patient sitting-still in the night woods, we may have the experience of seeing whole troops and companies of flying squirrels going about their nocturnal scamperings and soarings. It is an unforgettable thing to see. Flying squirrels are as playful as otters. They swoop and soar in pursuit of one another. They squeak in glee. They glide among the dark branches like enchanted shadows, like sprites, like materialized wood spirits. Outdoors, at night, the old magics of earth are very powerful. To watch a company

of flying squirrels about their aerial disportings is to be bewitched.

Flying squirrels live chiefly upon nuts, seeds, grains and berries, with now and then (like other squirrels) a small addendum of meat. Their nest in the tree-hollow is most commonly lined with shredded cedar bark. Their young are generally born in April or May, and there may be anywhere from two to six of them. It is all a very standard sort of squirrel-history . . . except for the flying. That, and the shyness and gentleness.

The shy gentleness has often persuaded naturalists to catch flying squirrels and try keeping them as pets. They make clean and affectionate ones, loving to curl up inside a man's shirt, loving still better to snuggle into a bed. But unless a man turns nocturnal himself, he must find his pet a dull one. It stirs and wakes up only when humanity is ready to go to bed. Flying squirrels tame fairly easily, and are as prankish indoors as out: rolling and chasing nuts, leaping and swooping from furniture to furniture, turning backward somersaults. But they are aroused to all this fey enthusiasm somewhere between the midnight and the dawn. In the daylight hours they curl their furry tails around the tips of their noses and sleep like Alice's dormouse.

The gliding flights of the little squirrels in the dark woods, as has

been said, are partly for travelling, partly for food-seeking, partly for gregarious fun. They are also made in another connection. It happens now and then that a family of squirrels is disturbed in its hollow tree. A passing human being, seeing an old woodpecker hole up in the trunk, raps on the tree to see what will come out. Or one of the squirrels' predatory enemies — an owl, a tree-climbing snake — comes prowling and snooping around. All flying squirrels are shy. A mother flying squirrel with babies has an extra protective timidity. One by one she gathers her infants. She holds a baby in her mouth, tucks its small body against her breast, partly holding it with her chin. Carrying her cargo, she leaps from the nest and goes gliding off to a new and presumably safer hollow. She makes as many trips as may be necessary to transport all the babies; and this is one circumstance — virtually the only one — which can stir her to prolonged daytime activity.

As was remarked at the beginning, we don't notice much of our world. It is full of sounds unheard, colors unremarked. It is full of creatures. More vastly than we guess, we are companions here.

There are lives going on under our feet, just outside our vision behind that oak leaf over there, just around the corner where sharp animal ears have heard our tread approaching. We miss a great deal by apathy, by self-centeredness. We miss something, too, even if we discipline ourselves to alertness, even if we rightly "come alive" to the blaze of being. For nature does much hiddenly, secretly. Her lives teem under the soil. They hide under cover of the dark. We may reflect tonight, as we climb into bed, that from thousands of dark treetops now — from the treetop, likely enough, just outside our window — there are launching out companies of a furry little mammal, enchanting and abundant, that few of us have even guessed existed.



LLOYD STRYKER: COUNSEL FOR DEFENSE

BY JEROME H. SPINGARN

EVERY criminal lawyer dreads the approach of the day when his ability becomes so renowned, his successes so celebrated, and his fees so high, that the public (from which juries are empanelled) begins to believe that no innocent man would go to the expense of hiring him. Max Steuer used to try to stave off this baleful fate by wearing shabby clothes and carrying his papers to court in a well-worn paper bag. Jurors might recognize the name, of course, but they would never believe that this was the *real* Max Steuer; it was just some poor starveling who happened to have the same name. His great contemporaries — Buckner, Untermeyer, Nathan L. Miller, Clarence J. Shearn — all had their careers blessed with equally unimpressive appearances and voices.

But Lloyd Paul Stryker, who is now probably the nation's most redoubtable criminal lawyer, has an assured manner and a gracious, resonant diction that would belie any such protective coloration. He has, how-

ever, found his own answer to the problem: a fierce and contagious belief in his own and his client's rectitude, and a supreme contempt for the underhandedness of prosecutors and the perjurious riffraff they trundle up to the witness stand.

Stryker's faith in his clients is a hardy and perverse flower — the more inclement the climate, the stronger it grows. He likes nothing better than to undertake the defense of someone whom the multitude has condemned before trial. His most spectacular clients, from Jimmy Hines through Alger Hiss, were men who were on the long end of the betting. But Stryker firmly believes that the ability to discover the truth in a mass of conflicting testimony belongs exclusively to a jury, aided by a pair of able lawyers and a competent judge. And he has nothing but disdain for the hunches of reporters and the suspicions of the man on the street.

Stryker has not been content to fight for unpopular causes in his own century alone. He has carried his

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