

Dear friends,

October 7, 2018

Some weeks ago I got a call from Nono Matondo, a good mechanic friend. "I'm in the neighborhood and would like to drop by for a brief visit."

I told him unfortunately I was out on an errand.

He insisted it would only be a moment. He was returning from a trip in the countryside and wanted to drop off gifts of fresh fruit and vegetables.

"OK, no problem, Katherine is at home."

Later, on returning home, I found the kitchen counter loaded with tomatoes, carrots, and peanuts; fruits of the soil and Katherine with a funny expression.

"What?"

"He also gave us a baby owl. What ever will we do with an owl!?"



Incredulous, I called Nono to thank him for the gifts and then asked "What kind of Congolese gives his friend an owl?"

In Congo (and Haiti) owls are uniformly feared and despised as purveyors of bad luck and omens of death.

Nono laughed. "It's just a bird the same as God created all birds, with no more power for evil than a dove."

Later Nono admitted that he bought it out of pity because some children had tied a string to it, making it fly like a toy drone, and it was obviously terrified. Once purchased Nono decided that given the cultural context, it was better under my roof than his.

For over a month now we have had a baby owl living freely on our screened in porch. Katherine calls him/her 'Hoot', but I deem 'Fluffy' is more appropriate. During the day Fluffy sequesters himself (herself?) in a wooden "bird house" to sleep, coming out only as night falls to occupy one of two perches we set up in opposite corners of the porch. From this perch, Fluffy keeps eyes and "ears" on the world. Fluffy eats MEAT, eagerly; delivered in chunks, on a kabob skewer. Will teaching him to hunt mean releasing live mice on the porch??!!



Fluffy in "wise mode."

Over the weeks the owl has gained in size, strength, and in ability to fly, shedding downy feathers and growing pin feathers. Hoot does not, in fact, hoot, but rather makes a gargling noise, becoming animated some evenings when another owl comes perching in the starlight on a nearby tree.

Interestingly we Americans view owls as wise, friendly creatures, useful for keeping down mice populations around us. Indeed, our owl takes on a 'wise' mode when bored or if we step outside. The internet says the proper name for a group of owls is a "Parliament," but one for now, is plenty. We hope soon to release him, though probably far from Kinshasa's burgeoning metropolis.

Nono remains a good friend. His faith has so changed his world view that not only has he discarded the strong local taboo concerning owls; he also values a small and helpless bit of God's creation enough to rescue it. Nono often brings gifts to me and others because "it is more blessed to give than receive". In this World Mission Offering season, Nono, and Congolese like him, remind us what it means to be salt for the earth. Thank you for being salt where you are, and for giving generously to the World Mission Offering so salt is sprinkled in places like Congo where you aren't!

Wayne Niles

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