

## A Parliament of Owls

*Life is all around us and in us: live gently on the earth - Jo Julin*

*Article reprinted courtesy of Marin Scope Newspapers*

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San Anselmo's Town Hall deer statue, known lovingly as "Sugarfoot," symbolizes the residents' love for its creatures – great and small. The population of San Anselmo is estimated at about 14,000 residents, but that doesn't account for the variety of creatures that also call the charming, historic Ross Valley town their home.

San Anselmo is a lush and welcoming habitat for a variety of animals including deer, squirrels, fish, ducks, egrets, herons, starlings, finches, black birds, pigeons and a very popular brood of barn owls who have nested in the town hall tower for the past six years.

Understanding and getting to know the wildlife residents is just the neighborly thing to do in San Anselmo. Just ask San Anselmo resident and urban naturalist Jo Julin, who strolls through the town daily, observing various species and noting their suburban lifestyle.

When a family of owls nested six years ago in the Town Hall tower located downtown, Jo and other curious residents made nightly visits to observe the town hooters. It wasn't long before the nightly visits became mini events, with a handful of residents bringing picnics along with their binoculars.

"Ask any San Anselmo old timer and they will tell you that owls have been nesting here for years," said Jo. "About 40 minutes after sunset, the owls chicks begin their 'food calls' and then the mother and father owls fly in with food. Sometimes, during the day, you can see owl chicks peeking out from nests in the tower balconies."

Jo estimates that about 20 owl chicks have nested in the tower during the past six years, with the most recent brood spotted last August nesting in the west-facing balcony of the tower. Most nests have three chicks, says Jo, but one year she spotted a family of five owl chicks homesteaded in the tower.

Another barn owl lover and observer, B.J. Synder of San Anselmo, who spotted another new brood of owl chicks in early September atop a palm tree at the Robson Harrington House in San Anselmo, established a way for residents to record their sightings of owls nesting in the San Anselmo Town Hall tower.

"We encourage people to record their owl observations in our journal, which can be found in the main entrance of Town Hall. We ask that they record their initials, the date, time, location and the owl activity observed. In 2004, our journal had over 100 entries," said B.J.



*Alighting on the tower of San Anselmo's Town Hall, an adult barn owl (left) brings a vole to her three fledglings. Photo by Bob Snyder.*

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