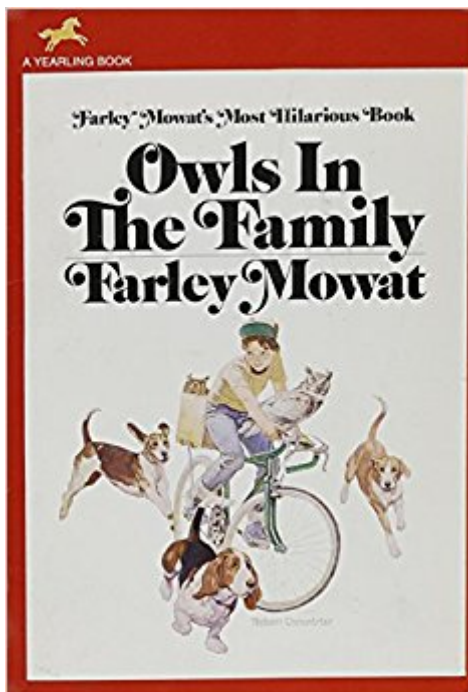


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# Owls In The Family



## Synopsis

Every child needs to have a pet. No one could argue with that. But what happens when your pet is an owl, and your owl is terrorizing the neighbourhood? In Farley Mowat's exciting children's story, a young boy's pet menagerie—which includes crows, magpies, gophers and a dog—grows out of control with the addition of two cantankerous pet owls. The story of how Wol and Weeps turn the whole town upside down is warm, funny, and bursting with adventure and suspense.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Farley Mowat was born in Belleville, Ontario, in 1921, and grew up in Belleville, Trenton, Windsor, Saskatoon, Toronto, and Richmond Hill. He served in World War II from 1940 until 1945, entering the army as a private and emerging with the rank of captain. He began writing for his living in 1949 after spending two years in the Arctic. Since 1949 he has lived in or visited almost every part of Canada and many other lands, including the distant regions of Siberia. He remains an inveterate traveller with a passion for remote places and peoples. He has twenty-five books to his name, which have been published in translations in over twenty languages in more than sixty countries. They include such internationally known works as *People of the Deer*, *The Dog Who Wouldn't Be*, *Never Cry Wolf*, *Westviking*, *The Boat Who Wouldn't Float*, *Sibir*, *A Whale for the Killing*, *The Snow Walker*, *And No Birds Sang*, and *Virunga: The Passion of Dian Fossey*. His short stories and articles have appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Maclean's*, *Atlantic Monthly* and other magazines. From the eBook edition. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Chapter 1 One May morning my friend Bruce and I went for a hike on the prairie. Spring was late that year in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Snowdrifts still clung along the steep banks of the river in the shelter of the cottonwood trees. The river was icy with thaw water and, as we crossed over the Railroad Bridge, we could feel a cold breath rising from it. But we felt another breath, a gentle one, blowing across the distant wheat fields and smelling like warm sun shining on soft mud. It was the spring wind, and the smell of it made us walk faster. We were in a hurry to get out of the city and into the real prairie, where you can climb a fence post and see for about a million miles how flat the prairie is. The great thing about Saskatoon was the way it ended sharp all around its edge. There were no outskirts to Saskatoon. When you stepped off the end of the Railroad Bridge you stepped right onto the prairie and there you were free as the gophers. Gophers were the commonest thing on the prairie. The little mounds of yellow dirt around their burrows were so thick, sometimes, it looked as if the fields had yellow measles. But this day Bruce and I weren't interested in gophers. We were looking for an owl's nest. We had decided that we wanted some pet owls, and if you want pet owls you have to find a nest and get the young ones out of it. We headed for the nearest of the clumps of cottonwood trees that dot the prairies, and which are called bluffs out in Saskatchewan. The ground was spongy under our sneakers, and it squooshed when we hit a wet place. A big jack rabbit bounced up right under my feet, and scared me so much I jumped almost as high as he did. And as we came nearer the bluff, two crows came zooming out of it and swooped down on us, cawing their heads off. Bluffs are funny places in the spring. The cottonwood trees shed a kind of white fluffy stuff that looks like snow. Sometimes it's so thick it comes right over the top of your sneakers and you get a queer feeling that you really are walking through snow, even though the sun on your back is making you sweat right through your shirt. We walked through this bluff, scuffing our feet in the cottonwood snow and stirring it up in clouds. We kept looking up; and after a while, sure enough, we saw a big mess of twigs high up in a poplar. "All right," Bruce said to the two crows which were swooping and hollering at us. "If you want me to snatch your eggs I will!" With that he handed me his haversack and began to shinny up the tree. It was an easy climb because cottonwood poplars always have lots of branches. When he got to the nest and looked into it I yelled up at him: "Any eggs?" Bruce grinned but he wouldn't answer. I could see him doing something with his free hand the one he wasn't holding on with and I knew there were eggs there all right. I watched, and sure enough he was popping them into his mouth so he could carry them down out of the tree. We always carried eggs down out of trees that way. The only thing was, crows' eggs are pretty big, and if you have to

stuff three or four of them into your mouth it nearly chokes you. Bruce started to climb down. When he got about ten feet from the ground he stepped on a rotten branch. Poplar branches are always rotten near the ground, and you have to watch out for them. I guess Bruce forgot. Anyway, the branch broke and he slid the rest of the way and lit on his seat with a good hard bump. All the eggs had broken, and Bruce was spitting out shells and eggs all over the cottonwood snow. I got laughing so hard I couldn't even talk. When Bruce got most of the eggs spat out he came for me and tackled me, and we had a fight. It didn't last long, because it was too hot to really fight, so Bruce ate a sardine sandwich to get the taste of crows' eggs out of his mouth and then we started across the prairie again to search through other bluffs until we found an owl's nest. I guess we searched about a hundred bluffs that morning, but we never saw an owl. We were getting hungry by then, so we made a sort of nest for ourselves on the ground, out of poplar snow and branches. We curled up in it and opened our haversacks. Bruce had sandwiches and a lemon in his. He was the only boy I ever knew who liked to eat lemons. He said they were better than oranges, any day of the week. I had a hard-boiled egg and just for fun I reached over and cracked the shell on Bruce's head. He yelled, and we had another fight, and rolled all over his sardine sandwiches. We were just finishing our lunch when a wood gopher came snuffling along through the cottonwood snow. Wood gophers are gray and have big bushy tails. This one came right up to us and, when I held a crust out to him, he shuffled up and took it out of my hand. "Got no sense," said Bruce. "You might have been a coyote, and then where'd he be at?" "Heck," I said. "He's got more sense than you. Do I look like a coyote?" The gopher didn't say anything. He just took the crust and scuttled away to his hole somewhere. We picked up our haversacks. The sun was as bright as fireworks and the sky was so clear you could look right through it like looking through a blue window. We started to walk. All of a sudden Bruce stopped so fast that I bumped into him. "Lookee!" he said, and pointed to a bluff about half a mile away. There must have been a million crows around it. It looked as if the bluff was on fire and filling the sky with black smoke that's how many crows there were. When you see a bunch of crows all yelling their heads off at something, you can almost bet it's an owl they're after. Crows and owls hate each other, and when a crow spots an owl, he'll call every other crow for miles and they all join in and mob the owl. We headed for that bluff at a run. The crows saw us coming but they were too excited to pay much attention. We were nearly deaf with their racket by the time we reached the edge of the trees. I was ahead of Bruce when I saw something big and slow go drifting out of one poplar into another. It was a great horned owl, the biggest kind of owl there is, and as soon as it flew, the whole lot of crows came swooping down on it, cawing like fury. I noticed they were careful not to get too

close. Bruce and I started to hunt for the nest. After a while, the owl got more worried about us than about the crows and away he went. He flew low over the fields, almost touching the ground. That way the crows couldn't dive on him. If they tried it they would shoot past him and crash into the dirt. There wasn't any owl's-nest in that bluff after all, but we didn't worry. We knew the nest would have to be in some bluff not too far away. All we had to do was look. We looked in different bluffs all afternoon. We found seven crows' nests, a red-tailed hawk's-nest, and three magpies' nests. I tore the seat out of my trousers climbing to the hawk's-nest, and we both got Russian thistles in our sneakers, so we had sore feet. It got hotter and hotter, and we were so thirsty I could have eaten a lemon myself, except that Bruce didn't have any more. It was past suppertime when we started back toward the railroad. By then we were pretending we were a couple of Arabs lost in the desert. Our camels had died of thirst, and we were going to die too unless we found some water pretty soon. "Listen," Bruce said. "There's an old well at Haultain Corner. If we cut over past Barney's Slough to the section road, we can get a drink." "Too late," I told him. "Good-bye, old pal, old Sheik. I am doomed. Go on and leave me lay." "Oh, nuts," said Bruce. "I'm thirsty. Come on, let's go." So we cut past Barney's Slough and there were about a thousand mallard ducks on it. They all jumped into the air as we went by and their wings made a sound like a freight train going over a bridge. "Wish I had my dad's gun!" said Bruce. But I was wondering why on the prairies they call lakes and ponds "sloughs." I still don't know why. But that's what they're called in Saskatoon. There was one big bluff between us and Haultain Corner. It was too far to go around it, so we walked right through it. Anyway, it was cooler in among the trees. When we were about halfway through I spotted a crow's-nest in a big old cottonwood. "Bet it's empty," I said to Bruce. But the truth was that I was just too hot and tired to climb any more trees. Bruce felt the same way, and we walked past. But I took one last look up at it, and there, sticking over the edge of the nest, was the biggest bunch of tail feathers you ever saw. My heart jumped right into my throat and I grabbed Bruce by the shirt and pointed up. It was a great horned owl all right. We kept as quiet as we could, so as not to scare her, and then we looked around the bottom of the tree. There were bits of rabbits and gophers, and lots of owl pellets. When owls catch something, they eat the whole thing "bones and fur and all. Then, after a while, they burp and spit out a ball of hair and bones. That's an owl pellet." "By Gang! We found it!" Bruce whispered. "I found it," I said. "Okay," said Bruce. "You found it, then. So how about you climbing up and seeing how many young ones are in it?" "Nothing doing, old pal," I replied. "I found the nest. So if you want one of the owlets, you climb up and have a look." Neither of us was keen to climb that tree.

The old owl was sticking close to her nest, and you can't always tell how fierce an owl is going to be. They can be pretty fierce sometimes. "Say," said Bruce after a while, "why don't we just leave her be for now? Might scare her into leaving the nest for good if we climbed up. What say we get Mr. Miller, and come back tomorrow?" Mr. Miller was one of our teachers. Bruce and I liked him because he liked the prairie too. He was a great one for taking pictures of birds and things. We knew he would be crazy to get some pictures of the owl " and Mr. Miller never minded climbing trees. "Sure," I said. "Good idea." We went off to Haultain Corner and got a drink of water that tasted like old nails, out of the broken pump. Then we walked on home. That night I told Dad about the owl's nest, and he looked at Mother, and all he said was: "Oh NO! Not owls too." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adorable book! We are using it as a read aloud in conjunction with an owl study in my fifth grade classroom. It has some teachable moments, including the idea of stealing a baby owl from its nest/mother and other examples of some inappropriate treatment of animals. I didn't see this as problem, despite my own sympathies for mistreatment of animals. All of my students were very concerned about the welfare of the animals in the story, so I think it only bolstered their strong feelings for animal welfare. If you're particularly sensitive to this content, I would still consider the book. The enjoyable writing style and delightful antics of the characters outweighed the more sensitive issues. I recommend it.

It's an okay book. It's all written in first person. I'm using it for my 4th and 2nd graders in homeschooling. We are doing owl lap books with it and dissecting owl pellets. It gives some good owl information and has some funny parts. It is an older book and lacks pc when it comes to talking about Native Americans. It also has some violent parts with bully older boys, and kids that hurt animals. Those parts I did not like. Other than that it was a decent book. It lacks character development and does not have a climax, it's more just Mowat's memories.

I read this to my second graders, they LOVED it and it was awesome.

For my wife who is pleased.

Great little summer read. My two boys ages 9&7 enjoyed this book a lot. We read it last summer and they wanted to read it again this summer. We then bought 5 copies for friends to read. A great

family read aloud book.

This book has had my family laughing for years. We take it on camping trips and read it to our most favorite guests. Don't be fooled by the opening of the book that seems like a younger kid's story--this book will have all ages in tears with laughter.

I'm so happy to own a copy of this book that I read when I was very, very young. Library binding is also a plus as this book will be given to my grandchildren someday.

Farley Mowat had so many fascinating experiences as a child and as an adult and is able to convey them wonderfully to the reader.

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