

The same people who say, “I wish I could live like this,” often follow that statement by mentioning the extreme quiet. I am not sure they are listening.

Noises in the country and, in particular, on the farm, are varied and fluctuating, and sometimes disturbing or puzzling. With such a variety of livestock, wildlife, weather, and whatever other natural phenomena that might exist, one never quite knows what sound will cause a quickening of the pulse or a cocking of an ear. But, it is seldom quiet.

Right now, the sheep flock is situated in a pasture with much too tall grass. As ewes and lambs look for each other, the bleating of the deeper voices of the mothers is overlaid by a melody of the higher tones of the lambs.

The milk cow and her two companions in the pasture near the barn sometimes hear or see the rest of the cattle herd on a distant hill. Then, they call back and forth, perhaps just announcing that they are, indeed, still here. The horses whicker and whinny, and their hooves are like distant thunder when all three run across their paddock together.

And, then, there are the sounds of the natural world that we disturb by our very presence. Even if no humans occupied this area, the tree frogs would still announce a coming rain. The spring peepers, bullfrogs, leopard frogs, and others keep our atmosphere well saturated with sound through the spring and early summer. The geese are loud, the ducks and songbirds seldom silent during the day, and the coyotes and bobcats occasionally let their presence be known.

With both domesticated animals and wildlife occupying the same territory, scolding is common. The crows and blackbirds complain when they are disturbed by the dogs or us. The redwing blackbirds, in particular, defend their territory with chatter and wings uncomfortably close to our heads. The male gives the “all clear” signal when we pass from his territory. The swallows indicate their disapproval of Muzzy the cat with the clicking sounds and accompanying swooping flight.

And the two roosters—the old Plymouth Rock and the young gray rooster of uncertain parentage—spar and crow, the “cockadoodles” becoming louder and more strident as the two gents try to outdo each other.

Then, with all this noise on a “quiet” farm, it is pleasant to settle down to the natural sounds—the wind in the trees, the rain on the metal roof of the cabin, the voices of the summer insects and the rustling of tall grasses. A thunderstorm and perhaps even hail, can disturb us at any time during the summer. And, sometimes, down on the road a few hundred meters from the cabin, an automobile interrupts the sounds of the unmotorized world. And yet, visitors from more populated areas think that we have complete and disconcerting quiet.