

Something I read recently—and I am not even sure where I read it—made me think that the word “knoll” is not used so widely in all English-speaking areas. And, even here, it is not an expression one hears very often.

But, that is how I always think of this little rise in the middle of the farm where our cabin stands, and it often comes into my description of where we live.

It isn't a high hill. There is no sharp rise from any direction except the north, and that isn't long. Still, it is definitely higher than the surrounding area, and it provides a good vantage point for watching birds and other wildlife and for keeping track of whatever livestock we may have on nearby pastures.

The way the cabin is situated, our little knoll also puts us in a prime position to view both sunrises and sunsets. Windows to the east and the west keep us attuned to weather, sky, and the colors of Nature during the time we are inside. And sound flows to our yard, too, bringing the frogs, geese, cranes, and killdeers into the house.

It is the frogs that are the most specific to our location. Our little knoll has swamps on three sides, and four if one goes around the farm buildings to the south. The most sure sign of spring is the first sound of a frog. And now, after a couple of “freeze-ins” that silenced them, we are surrounded by sound. The peepers, chorus frogs, wood frogs, and more serenade us day after day and night after night. And a little later, we will begin to hear the tree frogs and look for those changeable gray/green rain predictors.

I have heard people refer to swamps, marshes, and bogs in unpleasant terms, calling them ugly, brushy, dead-looking, mosquitoey, and unworthy of our attention. The people expressing these opinions often do so with curled lips indicating extreme disfavor. They would like to see these places drained, diverting our precious water into ditches to remove it from its natural place.

The wind strikes this knoll with peculiar force, for we aren't protected from any side. The songbirds that come to feeders aren't interested in flying here. There is no cover for them when the winter snow and wind dominate our world. But, we are compensated by the proliferation of meadow birds when spring comes—killdeers, meadowlarks, kingbirds, red-winged blackbirds, bobolinks, and the robins that don't seem intimidated by any environment. Eagles and hawks are plentiful, and my favorite ravens are regular residents. The deer population is way too high, and we see them in all directions. The other animals of this area that don't hesitate to visit us we try to avoid. We take care to keep the dogs from skunks, and we hope never again to meet Blue as we did once when we returned to the yard after working on a fence—as she looked hopefully at us with a face peppered with porcupine quills. Raccoons sometimes cross the yard from somewhere to somewhere, and muskrats live in the swamp to the east, so they have occasionally made their presence known, but for most of the time, our knoll holds no unexpected dangers.

We are two-tenths of a mile from the road, and walking to the mailbox is usually the only time we venture even that far into the more settled world. The pleasures we might find in the wider world don't seem to compare with the satisfaction of life on our knoll.

