



"Local Fireman to the Reverse-Rescue"

by Piper Hunter

I got in two baby barn owls last Thursday...I think they came out of the nest because of the heat during the early part of the week. They were very cute balls of white down feathers with ravenous appetites (each could eat a whole cut up gopher each day!) I spent several hours a couple of nights trying to get them back into the right tree, but wasn't successful finding the nest and it didn't seem that any mother owl was around.

On Saturday, Jeri and I went back during the day and we thought we may have found the nest, but it was about 30 feet high, so we weren't quite sure. She brought her powerful binoculars, but we still couldn't be certain. We happened to see the fire dept several hundred yards down the road on a drill at an old abandoned building and we asked if they would come by with a ladder to help us out. Well, they were a little reluctant, but they did come over. They got their 25' ladder up there, but were unable to see any nest in the trees. We thanked them very much, and they went on their way.

Well, not two minutes later, we saw a barn owl box way up (50') on a near-by building. I went inside the building to see if I could access the box from their attic. It turned out the owner remembered me when we played soccer 23 years ago and that her husband had retired from the fire dept years ago. Her husband said "You need the fire department!" I answered, "They were just here, and I doubt they would come back." He immediately got on the phone and made a call and said they should be right over. Jeri and I went back to my house to retrieve the baby owls. When we returned, the fire truck was there, the supports were out and the big extension ladder was ready to go up.

Our story has a happy ending with the fire department putting the chicks back in the owl box. We asked the firemen why they came back and they said, "When the captain calls, you respond!" They said they didn't want this story going to the newspaper as then he would have to buy everyone in the department an ice cream (some sort of tradition). They had to use their big extension ladder attached to their truck to get up to the owl nesting box and then had to carry the hissing, razor-sharp taloned babies up there, but they did it. We were very grateful!

I have taken babies owls back to nests several times, and the mom always takes them back, so I'm sure it will work again this time. It was a successful day for Jeri and me thanks to the fire department!

