

A Postcard from the Hollow of Mikey the Powerful Owl

Georgia Cameron

Woo Hoo – Greetings from the big smoke!

After a long red-eye flight, I landed safely in Sydney's peri-urban fringe on a wing and a prayer. The runway lit up like a Christmas tree with hazard reduction burns, so my claws were crossed I wouldn't choke on smoke or scorch my feathers with flying embers. Those humans call it climate change.

It's not a hoot for fly-in-fly-out workers like me trying to make a tree change. Even though I've squirrelled my savings away, buying a home is impossible as prices are through the tree tops and interest rates are sky high. The median price for a 150-year-old heritage-listed hollow that ticks all the nest boxes is way above my budget.

With all the land clearing for development it's also hard to rent. There are queues of wildlife lining up at every open hollow inspection. I'm competing against Norma the Noisy Miner and Raylene the Rainbow Lorikeet. Some hollows are hired out short-term through *Airbnt (Air Birds 'n' Trees)*, according to local real estate legend Konnor the Kookaburra.

But, I'm a clever Powerful Owl and reached out to Councillor Colin the Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo. He wrote a review for me on *OwledIn* and I secured a sub-penthouse hollow – 100cm in diameter, 200cm deep and 10m from the forest floor with a panoramic valley view.

Now, hang onto your branches, because I've got some *eggs-citing* news ... I met my life partner Miley on *Timber!* Her amazing amber eyes, gorgeous grey-brown-white feathers and sensational strong talons instantly attracted me. She's 60cm tall, with a wingspan of 140cm and weighs about 1.4kg – though she's put on a bit of weight after all our date nights. I'm the luckiest Powerful Owl in the world – well, at least in Australia. I'll share a photo of us on *Owlagram* soon.

And promise you won't get in a flap, because I'm *egg-static* to announce we're pregnant! Please don't lecture me about completing my university degree or building up a superannuation nest egg before starting a family, as we're in love and will be mates for life, which should be about 30 years.

We'll be the best *Ninox strenua* parents on the planet and save our threatened species that's listed as vulnerable in NSW. Some ecologists estimate there could be as few as 5,000 of us in the universe and that's the magic number needed to preserve every threatened creature on earth. We don't want to end up endangered like Gabby the Gang-gang Cockatoo. So, I'm proud to say we're *eggs-pecting* twins – *Tick and Tock!* We reckon their gender reveal will go viral on the *Twittaverse*.

Right now, Miley's hunkered down in the hollow incubating the owlets and she's *eggs-hausted*. I'm winging it working three part-time jobs to pay the rent and put food on the branch. Every night at dusk I try to satisfy her cravings with home delivery from *Hollowlog* for dinner, however ringtail is in short supply and that's Miley's favourite. Sometimes she'll settle for flying fox, but complains it's too chewy. I'm counting down on my claws until I hear the chicks trill and watch them fledge.

Our family budget will be tight with two more beaks to feed. With the cost of living crisis, I'll probably resort to catching birds and there's a risk migrating flocks might import avian flu to Australia. The disease is spreading like wildfire overseas and the wonderful Sydney Wildlife Rescue volunteers and vets could be in the firing line. Bruce the Brush Turkey and Iris the Ibis are worried sick.

I'm super careful not to pick up prey with Second-Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticide in its system. Those toxic chemicals should be banned from the shelves of all supermarkets and hardware stores. SGARs don't just kill rats and mice – they kill wildlife like Polly the Possum and raptors like me through secondary poisoning.

Flying on my P-Plates in the big smoke is feather-raising. The traffic zooms past almost as fast as Percy the Peregrine Falcon. I wish those humans would slow down between dusk and dawn while I'm delivering takeaway for Miley and the chicks. Can you believe, according to BirdLife Australia, almost half of the deceased Powerful Owls across the Sydney Basin last year were the result of road kill? Sadly, in a case of mistaken identity, X marks the spot where a car collided with Tammy the Tawny Frogmouth.

The powerlines here are a huge hazard for wildlife too. First responders from emergency services and WIRES rescued Barbara the Bat and her pup Pluto when they got zapped. Our last energy bill was a shocker, so I'm voting for a local parliament of wise old owls who'll switch to safe, renewable, affordable power.

Those humans are such a strange species. They knock down fully-functional homes and build massive McMansions and sky-high towers – enough to give you a detached retina or beak bleed if you hit them at speed. Then, they lay fake grass, which drives Maggie the Magpie mad. But worse, they power up their garden tools on the weekend sending Red the Blue-tongue Lizard and Blue the Red-bellied Black Snake into a tailspin. And don't get me started about their free-range cats and off-leash dogs – even Eddie the Echidna and Walter the Water Dragon are petrified of their pets. Plus, they're just too inquisitive. You'd think post-pandemic they'd learn to social distance and stay at least 30 metres from our roosts and nests with their flash cameras and torches.

Anyway, how's life back home? I read on the *Internest* there's been mountains of land clearing for major infrastructure projects and Karla the Koala's colony is endangered. How bad is that? An iconic Australian marsupial on the brink of *eggs-tinction!* I'm keeping my claws crossed you're staying safe.

I've got to fly as I'm on the night shift, so I'll catch you soon.

xoxo Mikey the Powerful Owl

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AUSTRALIA