Whistle With an Acorn Cap

From the mighty oak tree comes a mighty noisemaker

1. Comb the woods for a perfect acorn cap, one with no cracks or chips and a nice bowl shape. Often, the best caps are still attached to their acorns. (No acorns in your neck of the woods? Use a plastic cap from a soda bottle.)

2. Place the cap between your thumbs and forefingers, open side facing you as shown, below. Press your thumbs firmly against the cap’s edge.

3. Bend your thumb knuckles slightly to create a triangular opening at the top of the cap. Squeeze your thumbs together to form an airtight seal.

4. Place your lower lip on the knuckles of your thumbs, purse your top lip to focus your breath stream, and blow sharply over the top of the triangular opening. Get anything? Keep trying, adjusting the position of your thumbs or lips. With practice, you’ll be able to produce a sharp, head-turning tone. Note that caps with shallow bowls will produce higher whistles, those with deep bowls, lower.

How it works: When you blow just right, the air jet from your lips butts into the air trapped inside the bowl of the acorn cap. The trapped air acts like a bouncy spring, forcing the air jet in and out of the cap. Just how fast this jet goes in and out determines how high or low a whistle we hear. With a bigger cap, the air is slightly more springy. As a result, the jet vibrates slightly more slowly and the note produced is slightly lower.