



Tales from a
Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

Our band-tailed pigeon

There I was, checking my email — as I do every morning — when up pops one from my good friend and fellow airman down the road, Sage Dorsey.

Every once in a while, Sage will strap me into the back seat of his beautiful Bellanca Scout and we'll fly out over forest and rimrock looking for a new golden eagle nest.

Well, Sage announced he had a band-tailed pigeon in his backyard. Three of them, as a matter of fact. Now, Old Jim, being the wise and knowledgeable naturalist that he is, responded with a know-it-all note suggesting Sage had mistaken the band-tailed for our current pestiferous alien, the Asian collared dove.

Sage patiently responded

that he knew the band-tailed from years of hunting them as a kid in southwest Oregon, and upon reading that comment, I said to myself, "Uh-oh! Foot-in-mouth-disease has struck Old Jim again."

About four days later, my wife, Sue and I had supper over at Mary Smith's home near Cascade Estates, and after a dessert of deee-licious berry pie and ice cream she said, "Hey, come over here and see the bird photos I shot yesterday in my backyard."

Yep, you guessed it: three beautiful portraits of a band-tailed pigeon.

So they have been discovered in Sisters Country. Now the question is, where else have they been seen?

I sent an email to my expert birder pals Tom Crabtree and Chuck Gates to see what they had to say. Tom wanted to know how many and where, and said, "Nice picture. Is it still around? They aren't real common unless you are near the crest of the Cascades. I'd say we average a couple of reports a year."

Chuck said, "Deschutes band-tails are pretty rare. About 20 records going back to the '60s. What was the date of this sighting? They will sometimes hang around a while if they are coming to a feeder."

Now it's your turn. Please keep your eyes open if you have a bird feeder. Or if you're a hiker. Take a good look at Mary's splendid photograph and let me know if you see them at your home, the park, or anywhere else in Central Oregon. (I'll buy you a milkshake if you have a valid report, you can reach me at jim@northwestnaturalist.net.)

The band-tailed pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*) is a medium-sized pigeon found throughout the western U.S., British Columbia, Washington, California and Southern Arizona. It can also be found — much to my surprise — in the higher elevations of Mexico and Central America all the way to northern Argentina.

The bird was first described by Thomas Say, a pioneering American naturalist who is widely considered the father of descriptive entomology in the U.S. He was collecting insects in the Rocky Mountains in 1824, spotted the big, beautiful pigeon, named it for science, and published the account in the *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*.

In late summer it migrates out of Oregon into northern California, New Mexico, and parts of Utah and Colorado.



PHOTO BY MARY SMITH

Our band-tailed pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*), photographed in Cascades Estates, located between Sisters and Bend.

One of their prime foods is acorns (which may be why we don't see them around here too often).

They're present all year in some areas, especially on the Pacific Coast, but mainly summer elsewhere, including the northwestern coast and southwestern interior. Strays have reached the Atlantic Coast.

Like all pigeons, it builds a rudimentary platform nest out of twigs, in which it lays one or two eggs. Outside the breeding season it forms flocks, sometimes over 50

birds, and often becomes nomadic, following the acorn crop or moving to lower altitudes or other areas outside its breeding range.

Sage thought they were blown here in the last big windstorm we had, and I tend to agree with him. After all, he obviously knows a lot more about band-tailed pigeons than I do...

Thank you, Sage, Mary, Tom and Chuck for opening my eyes and poor old brain to the possibility of seeing more of these beautiful pigeons in Central Oregon.



Experience Sisters Country.

Winter activities abound throughout the Sisters Country — enjoy the snow or simply sit by the fire and sip hot chocolate! Spend some time strolling through town and explore the one-of-a-kind owner-operated shops, boutiques, galleries and restaurants.

Shop Local. Shop Sisters.

Stop in at the Visitor's Center, 291 E Main Ave, and get your Sisters Country Gift Certificate - good at most businesses throughout Sisters Country.



Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce
www.SistersCountry.com
866.549.0252 541.549.0251

