Tales from a
# Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

## Poisoning our world

Our world is in a world of hurt. I have a dreadful feeling that not too long from now we'll discover a lot of what we call home is soaked with deadly chemicals, especially our water reserves.

The corn-growers in the midwest have been dumping agricultural chemicals into the soil for a hundred years in the hopes of getting a better crop and making more money. Closer to home, some hay farmers are doing the same thing to rid their fields of "weeds," and in some cases insects and rodents.

On a healthier vein, it's with a sigh of relief when I pass a sign, "No Spray!" and the green organic irrigated hayfields while heading east on the Bend-to-Burns highway between Brothers and Hampton and see all those beautiful dandelions growing in among the alfalfa. I know there are no poisons killing "weeds" and raptors, and no chemicals soaking into the soils to make the alfalfa greener than it should be.

In addition to the chemicals are the other poisons, in the full sense of the term, the deadly rodenticides. Gary Landers, our local raptor rehabber, began seeing raptors from the Powell Buttes area suffering from secondary poisoning years back. Chemical-laced poison is applied to the land to kill rodents, the hawks eat the dead rodents on the surface, and they, too, ended up dead.

Last Spring, while working with the Oregon Eagle Foundation and the USFWL on a golden eagle census for Oregon, we found two baby eagles dying and then dead from secondary poisoning in a nest between Sisters and Bend. The necropsy report stated they had died from brodifacoum and bromadiolone, both second-generation anti-coagulant rodenticides.

On the heels of the eagle necropsy report came this alert from the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA):

*Recently the Oregon Department of Agricultural was contacted by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) regarding finding a dead great horned owl in the mid-Willamette Valley. The owl tested positive for brodifacoum and bromadiolone, both second-generation anti-coagulant rodenticides. The owl appeared to be a victim of secondary poisoning; the owl did not eat the poison directly, but ate rodents, which had consumed the poison.*

*According to ODFW, owls are expert nocturnal hunters and provide free rodent control, and it's estimated a barn owl can consume a third of its body weight per night. That's about six voles or vole-sized rodents an evening and over 2,000 voles per year. If you have a pair of owls, double that. And once they have a nest with young they consume even more rodents. The young birds are particularly susceptible to being poisoned. It is especially important not to use anti-coagulant rodenticides in your barn if you have roosting or nesting raptors…*

*Take-home message – Do not use these products in gardens, agricultural fields or other places that are not specifically indicated on the label. If you have raptors in the area, particularly nesting raptors, use an alternative method of rodent control. For more information regarding rodent control, go to, http://npic.orst.edu/pest/rodent.html.*

Thank goodness, the EPA is in the loop and is banning the use of the more deadly poisons, and changing the labels for use on others. According to ODA, brodifacoum bait—a primary rodenticide—is causing the death of deer, squirrels, chipmunks, passerine birds and even children—71 percent identified as occurring in urban or suburban residential areas. The half-life of this chemical is 307 days!

Several years back, ODOT applied this bait in the Brothers Oasis in an effort to reduce the ground squirrel population that was eating the beautiful green lawn in the picnic area. It may have worked for the target species, but western meadowlarks—the Oregon State bird—and other birds were also killed, along with the only known nesting burrowing owls in Deschutes County.

Please, good people, lay off putting more poison into our environment. If you're raising hay and need to eliminate gophers and ground squirrels, hire it done by trapping, and chalk it up to the cost of doing business.

There's a hay farmer in the Fort Rock Valley growing alfalfa on several 125-acre plots irrigated with pivots who refuses to use poisons of any kind. He hires a trapper to rid his field of unwanted rodents. It makes for happier and healthier owls, hawks, and people.

And if you don't like the dandelions in your lawn, please pull them up, don't spray them. My bees will be everlastingly grateful.

PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

**A grisly sight; a nestling golden eagle, found dead in its nest between Bend and Sisters from secondary agricultural poisoning.**