



Tales from a
Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

Please, put 'em back if you can!

This is that time of year when baby birds begin appearing in unexpected places. The other day, I got a call on my cell phone from a lady on a bike who had come upon a baby bird right in the middle of the bike path. She said she screeched to a halt, leaned her bike against a tree and was about to pick up the little darlin' when she was suddenly accosted by a very irate momma robin.

That was a happy ending, the biker said to herself: "Momma bird is attacking me; there's a baby bird in front of me and I bet they know each other." She did the best thing possible; picked up the baby bird and placed it in a crotch of the tree her bike was leaning against, then jumped back on and continued her ride, and called me, asking, "Did I do the right thing?"

Did she ever!

Last week I received a call from Dixie, who lives out near Camp Polk, she was concerned about a "baby owl" on the ground in her backyard. I suggested she place box over it with a rock on top and I'd come and see what's going on when the opportunity showed itself.

About dusk, I rolled into Dixie and Bill's front yard

and they took me to the box I told them to set over the owl to protect it from jays and blackbirds who mob owls any time they see one.

As I was slowly feeling around under the box I thought I heard murmurings of a Western screech owl right over my head. As soon as my hands closed over the tiny owl under the box it let out a chirp, and the sound over my head said, "I'm here, Sweetie don't worry," (in screech owl language).

Sure enough, as I was showing Dixie and Bill the little backyard owl, momma screech owl flew right over me, landed on a limb close-by and began talking to her child. As it turned out, the baby screech was still in the downy stage, but it's wings were very well developed and could sustain the owl in flight.

After a conversation with Bill and Dixie I was pretty sure blue jays or other birds knocked the owl off a limb and when it hit the ground, Dixie saw it as it ran for cover.

Bill got me a ladder and very kindly held it for me next to a small pine as I placed the little fledgling on the highest limb I could reach. When the little guy was thoroughly settled on the limb we all retreated from its refuge and left well enough alone. I didn't see any hungry cats waiting nearby, and Bill and Dixie said they were going back in the house and let momma owl do her thing, so I quietly drove away and came back home feelin' good.

I just love these kinds of "recoveries." Momma owl was there to care for her wandering child which meant Jeff and Jeannette at High Desert Wildlife Rehab didn't have to care for the little guy until it could fly

and catch its own mice.

That's the best way to solve just about any baby bird problem you find on the ground. Pick it up and place it on the nearest limb. Make sure it's perched safely and leave it be.

Don't worry about that old tale about having the smell of your hands on the baby bird and mom will never go near it again. That's been around way too long and doesn't have a grain of truth in it.

If you ever come upon a young turkey vulture on the ground, DO NOT EVEN ATTEMPT TO PICK IT UP! That IS the time to call me, ODFW or Jeff Cooney at High Desert Rehab. The awful offal those birds are fed from the time they hatch would gag a maggot, and as such it's loaded with pathogens that would give you the heebie-jeebies. You'd get a lot of that stuff when the vulture bit you, and boy, can they bite.

So, other than that, it's best to put baby birds back into the wild if you find one lost or stranded. Even a momma robin will feed some other robin's kid if it's squawking for food, and wrens and finches will do likewise.

But if you have to do something you're not sure of, or want to share your experience, go ahead and call me. My traveling phone is 541-480-3728. I may be out in the back end of Harney County banding eagles, but I'll try and get someone to help you. And thanks for caring...

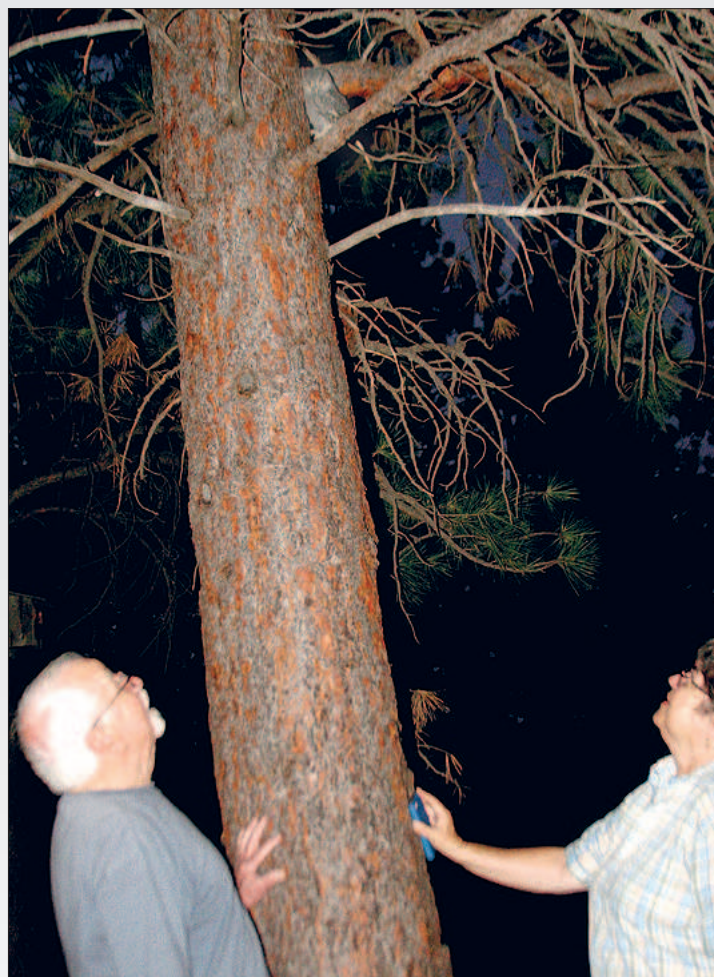


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Bill and Dixie kept a sharp eye on a baby owl.

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