



**Tales from a
Sisters
Naturalist**
by Jim Anderson

Death on the highway

Back in the early 1960s, I began placing USFW #9 bands on the legs of golden eagle nestlings. I had been climbing into and out of eagle nests in Deschutes, Lake and Jefferson counties from about 1953, trying to learn more about diet, territory, mortality and their natural history.

I found nestlings and adults shot in the nest, then I discovered both bald and golden eagle dead near 1080 poison stations all across the Great Sandy Desert and Fort Rock District of the Deschutes National Forest, and along the highways.

There are events taking place today that are still killing eagles and owls unnecessarily. It bothers me — and it bothers one of my good pals, raptor-rehabber Gary

Landers, who sent me this:

“Today, September 6, 2015, I recovered the carcass of the probable mate to the other dead golden eagle I picked up previously. A witness observed the eagle struck by a truck on Highway 126 at Deep/Dry Canyons. The eagle was dead, laying beside the highway when I arrived, killed near a perch site identified by BLM Prineville as frequented by the Fryrear Butte pair. It appears both adult GOEA's from the Fryrear Breeding Area have been killed by human activity in less than three months.”

Speed kills.

The dead owl I'm holding in the photo didn't have a chance! The excessive speed of automobiles and trucks on Highway 20 is outside any common sense. Deer are smashed into hamburger by speeding motorists, as well as owls, hawks and eagles.

In the '60s I was receiving several eagle band returns in winter from birds killed on Highway 31, near the deer winter range area. Looking the eagles over it was obvious some were killed from a direct blow to the head and body, but several had signs of some kind of prolonged, physical punishment.

A physics teacher explained how and why after

a talk on raptors I was giving at OMSI. It seems when a truck is going down the highway at a high rate of speed, a vacuum is formed all around the trailer. An eagle, feeding on a road-killed deer on the highway, would leap from the carcass as it sensed the approaching truck, but couldn't get far enough, and consequently fall into the vacuum and would strike the side of the truck again and again, and finally be thrown clear.

Our president at that time was Lyndon B. Johnson, who lowered the speed limit to 55 mph on federal highways to save fuel, and Richard Nixon went along with it when he became president. After that took place, I didn't get as many road-killed eagle returns from the banding lab in winter — shooting and electrocution moved to the top.

Speed kills.

Over the last year I have picked up larger numbers than usual of dead great horned owls and hawks along Highway 20 between Sisters and Bend, all of them pulverized like the one in the photo above, skulls crushed, wings smashed, and in some cases, the cranium so severely crushed, brains were sprayed all over the body.

About once a week I have



PHOTO BY SUE ANDERSON

That's me holding a dead adult great horned owl, I picked it up along Highway 20; still clutching a fresh-caught mouse in it's talons.

to swerve to the shoulder of Highway 20 — just past the Fryrear curve on my way to Bend — to avoid a head-on-collision with some speeder who has to pass in that oncoming passing lane, no matter who's coming from the opposite direction.

Look at all the fuel that's wasted as we allow speeders to roar past us on the highway, just so they can get somewhere a little faster. Look at those oxygen-stealing fumes that stink so badly as those speeders go roaring

by. Gary says he's in favor of five-dollar-a-gallon fuel; he thinks that might slow some of them down. I'm with him.

Now, in their infinite wisdom, our state legislature is considering raising the speed limit.

The people who pass me on Highway 20 going well over 70 may be part of that explanation. I know for sure they're the ones who are pulverizing owls catching rodents and eagle feeding on carrion.

Speed kills.

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