



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist by Jim Anderson

New things to watch for...

Last week, Kathy Winn, who lives north of Sisters, sent me a photo of an owl perched on a road sign near Sage Meadow, thinking I'd enjoy seeing it. Did I ever!

I thanked Kathy for thinking of me — and all of us here in Sisters Country: “Many thanks for the sighting, Kathy — that’s the barred owl (BAOW) a species who is (supposedly) causing a great deal of havoc with the northern spotted owl (SPOW), and a row between birders and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.”

BAOWs found their way here from the eastern part of the U.S., New England and eastern Canada, via forest clearcuts, and USFW biologists claim BAOWs are causing serious, long-term genetic problems and competing for prey with SPOWs.

While SPOWs are native birds of Northwest old-growth

forests, preying on arboreal rodents, and other rodent and insect species of old-growth, BAOWs are generalists who can make a living just about anywhere. The most serious problem is the BARO and SPOW are genetically so close, they can — and do — interbreed. The USFW named the X-breed young sparred owls. One school of thought says the young are sterile, but another says they will continue interbreeding until both species are so mixed no one will know which is which — or whooo is whooo.

The factor that makes this a serious zoological problem is that we humans are to blame, with our forest practice of clearcuts, by creating habitat that encouraged the BAOW to make it here. Therefore, we are set upon solving a problem we created, and USFW thinks killing BAOWs is one way to do it.

That in itself is another problem that gets us in a lot of trouble: thinking that killing a species to protect something else will solve the problem. Right now killing sea lions is supposed to solve the problem of them eating salmon, which won't work in the long run.

Killing coyotes to protect sage grouse and pronghorn antelope kids was supposed to help survival of pronghorn

babies. That didn't work either: range improvement with controlled burns — and getting cows off — the grouse and pronghorn kidding and weaning habitat was the answer. Improving range, and getting cows out of sage grouse habitat will be the ultimate answer to protecting the grouse from extinction.

In fact, killing coyotes on the kidding areas had just the opposite of the desired impact. Way back in the '60s, I did a stomach analysis of the coyotes killed and found they were actually a positive influence by feeding on the rodents and rabbits that competed for food with grouse and pronghorns.

“Thanks again,” I told Kathy. “You have — as far as I know — provided the second record of a barred owl in Sisters. Get busy now and find a hawk owl. That'll blow the socks off our local birders — and be the *first* record for



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Northern hawk owl. Please watch for it; 10,000 birders far and wide will thank you!

Sisters Country!”

The hawk owl is so rare in the U.S. that most range maps do not even mark it as a casual visitor to the U.S., but only in Canada and into the northern parts of Europe. But, as far as I know, it has twice

been seen in Central Oregon. The last time it was here in 2008 I put it on my Bird Life List when I observed it out in the southeastern part of Bend in a burn.

If you see it, call me, please! 541-480-3728.

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