



Tales from a
Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

**Don't feed deer.
Feed birds!**

Don't feed deer. The deer don't need the help; they will become so pestiferous you won't be able to stand it — and if you keep it up long enough you'll have cougars running all over your place.

Birds, however, are another matter entirely.

Feeding birds and going to the post office are fun projects for me. There's a lot of just plain good times that take place in the Sisters post office. Really, the times I have gone there and haven't been stopped by someone for a bird question or wildlife story is very rare, and I love it.

The other day a young woman stopped me while Roger was helping me mail something and asked, "Jim, what are these tiny, long-tailed birds that come to my feeder, all talking to each other and so active?" I said, "Kinglets." Immediately another voice piped up, correcting me and said, "Bushtits." And he was right.

Bushtits run around together about 10 or so

in a bunch. They visit my feeder and immediately latch onto the flickers' suet feeder. "Oh, look at this!" they exclaim. "Isn't this just deeee-licious!" and set to work pigging out on the suet. With the feeder just outside the kitchen window it's entertainment that money can't buy — unless you consider what you're paying for the bird food at the various places in Sisters where it's available.

Providing water for birds is just as important as providing food. When ponds and other water sources are locked up with ice, local birds will appreciate your heated birdbath. If you don't have a heated birdbath, you don't have to spend much to provide a heated water source — just get one of those heated dog bowls and put it out. The birds will flock to you.

Then there's the quail. This time of year they can sometimes be hurting for scratch, so, like the sucker I am, I supply it. In all the years I've lived at Sun Mountain I have seen our quail population go from tiny to wonderful, and I think it's because of the scratch my neighbors and I give them in winter.

And if you want to increase your quail population and make them even happier, don't burn the next pile of limbs you collect. Place them someplace where it doesn't bother you (away from a structure in the event it could somehow catch fire). Make the pile big enough so

you can place a thin piece of waterproof plywood on it about 10 inches off the ground, pile more limbs on top of that, and it becomes a perfect quail sanctuary.

Unfortunately, we also have stray, feral and outdoor cats that also enjoy the activity around my feeder. Thankfully, the resident coyotes thin 'em out at times.

If you'd like a unique method of keeping feral cats away from your feeder, I'll share it with you, but you'll have to send me an email: jim@northwestnaturalist.net. It involves "staking out the territory."

Feeding deer will attract predators, and so will feeding birds. I have a Cooper's hawk and a sharp-shinned (accipiters, aka bird hawks) that stick around all winter. They're the clean-up-crew. When a junco, house sparrow, finch or quail on its last legs turns up, they're immediately recycled by one or the other accipiter.

I had a Cooper's hawk one year that got into chasing the birds off the feeder by making an F-16 style fly-by. As he pulled up he'd spot the one that was too slow in making its escape, or the one that hit my window, double back and pounce on it. Watching a bird hawk in action is as much fun as watching the bushtits mobbing my suet feeder.

Feeders are also a wonderful way to record population trends of local birds, and once in a while a strange bird will come to visit your feeder; a bird



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

A pile of bushtits pigging out on the flickers' suet feeder, 10 in all.

from out-of-state or even out-of-country. This usually happens in winter when the winds and storms drive a migrating species off in a direction it/they hadn't intended. If you see a stranger on your feeder, please try to photograph it immediately; if that fails ask someone to help you write down its description, then mark it all on your calendar.

If you think there's time, please call me:

541-480-3728. I'll do my best to get there for a voucher photo. Such events are important to bird organizations that keep track of them. An example is the hawk owl that has come down from Canada to visit. There are only two county records of that happening, and I was so fortunate to see the last one that visited us in southeast Bend.

Happy birding, all! See ya at the post office...



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Sisters Public Library
Dedicated January 2006

Sisters Library Annual Art Exhibit

January 13 – February 25

Reception to meet the artists.
Friday, January 22, 6 to 7:30 p.m.
People's Choice Awards and Silent Auction

The community may vote at the library for the awards between Wednesday, January 13 & Friday, January 22.

All are invited!

For information, contact Zeta Seiple at 541-549-6157
or Paul Alan Bennett at 541-588-0156.

"Stitching Potpourri" Class Preview Party

Saturday, January 9th, 9 am – 2 pm
10% discount on tuition at the party.*

(*Does not apply to retreats and workshops from nationally known instructors.)

We have a very fun Preview Party planned, where you can participate in some simple "make it and take it" projects while you are registering and viewing the class samples.

Look for our class selections on our website, or stop by the store to pick up a class schedule.



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