



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

They're baaaaack!

One of the things I love about writing this column is all the help I get from friends who enjoy the wild things around us as much as I do. Which is also exactly how I feel when friends like Steve and Susie Allely call, text or email with news of what the wild things are up to in Sisters Country.

They sent me this email recently: "I spoke with you at Bi-Mart some time back about the turkey vultures (TV) and their return every year. Believe it or not I spotted a big mature TV in the roost trees today. In all the years we've lived here this



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Nestling TV on the Deschutes National Forest.

is the earliest I've ever seen one. I confirmed it by walking around the tree with binoculars to make sure it wasn't a hawk. Its not, it's a big mature vulture."

Steve and his wife, Susie, have been quietly watching the Sisters TV night roost for almost 30 years. That's when all the Sisters Country TVs were spending the night in the trees out behind the fire hall — sometimes to the chagrin of house and motor vehicle owners who didn't appreciate all the awful TV offal on their roofs.

It's been said some of the home and motor vehicle owners in the TV night roost area set off bottle rockets and other non-lethal scare devices that sent some of the TVs scurrying away, an action that created another night roost near the Peterson Ridge trail-head in use today.

Steve spotted the single adult late last month, and now there are seven soaring about. The usual dates for the TVs to appear in Sisters is around March 8-12. Early arrival may be another indicator that things are warming up in western America.

Steve and Susie have seen a definite TV pecking order for who will get to use the best limb on the ponderosa pine on any given night, and — much to the surprise of many people who claim TVs can only make a hissing sound — he has heard them make very low croaking sounds when push came to shove establishing night roost perch preferences.

He has also had the enjoyment of watching what many of us enjoy so much when the TVs come in to roost: they change from expert soaring birds to bumbling feathered nincompoops crashing



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Turkey vultures roosting on the Malheur National Wild Refuge wildlife observation tower (sans the Bundy takeover's flag).

into one another, causing complete confusion as they (finally) settle in for night. These antics are especially noticeable when a storm is approaching and, as Steve puts it, "They're trying to get under the porch for the night to try and stay dry."

In fact, the observations Steve and Susie have made of TV behavior seems to suggest that TVs have the ability to sense atmospheric pressure changes — to know when a storm is approaching, especially a summer thunder-bumper — and come in early and take shelter to their night roosts to get out of the oncoming dangerous weather.

Then there's swallows that use feathers from other birds to line their nests; the Allelys have watched as swallow fly

back and forth under the TVs night roosts snatching falling feathers out of the air as the vultures are doing their morning grooming.

From research done back in the 1960s, TVs spend the winter in the Salton Sea area of Central California. I banded TVs for several years trying to find out more about their seasonal movements, longevity and range. But the banding lab put a hold on all leg-banding because TVs poop and urinate down their legs to aid in body temperature adjustments. However, there is a marking method used in Canada and the U.S. that entails placing a small colored tag on the leading edge of the wing, called a patagial marker. If you see one, please let me know.

Sisters track teams have high goals

By Charlie Kanzig
Correspondent

With the largest turnout in recent years, the Sisters High School track teams have Head Coach Jeff Larson expecting the Outlaws to have a big impact in the Sky-Em League and at the state level.

The girls team overwhelmed the rest of the league last year, amassing 161 points to win the district title, and had athletes in eight individual events and both relays at the state meet where the team finished tied for 12th place.

But with all but one of the qualifiers returning, along with a crew of newcomers, Larson expects the girls team to come out even stronger for the 2016 campaign.

The Outlaws show depth in the sprints, hurdles, and pole vault, and potential in the throwing, jumping, and distance events as well.

Michaela Miller, one of five seniors on the team, returns as the district champion in the 100 and 300 hurdles. She scored in both hurdles races at state and ran a leg of the 400-meter relay that placed fourth along with Erynn Ricker, Mandi Calavan, and Macadia Calavan. Miller also

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There will be a celebration of life for Harold and Jean O'Hara, Saturday, April 9, from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Sisters Community Church. Everyone is welcome.



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