



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist

by Jim Anderson

Homes for birds, bats, and butterflies

It's spring and cavity-nesting birds are looking for homes to raise babies in. In last week's *Nugget*, Jodi Schneider offered a wonderful birdwatching piece, and suggested you build them homes.

OK, here's how to do it.

Head out to the nearest housing construction project, and if they're using plywood (not particle board), ask the builders to put their rem (wood remnants) aside in a pile and when the job's done, go by with a box of donuts, give it to the builders, bring the plywood home and start building birdhouse nesting boxes.

(I have been building nesting boxes for well over 40 years, and in that period of time I have never had a builder say no, and some/most of them have been kind enough to help me load the rem into my pickup).

This is not only a good way to recycle the excess wood, but your opportunity to really put your personal effort into supplying a much

needed portion of wild-life habitat that has gone missing.

Back in the 1950s and '60s, the logging/forestry industry took it upon themselves to become forest fire rangers and denounced all the dead standing trees (snags) in the forest as lightning rods and removed them. That was the beginning of the end for cavity-nesters. What really finished off snags back in those "good old days" was when Brooks-Scanlon in Bend started milling and selling "Brooks Wood," beautiful multi-colored pine boards cut from snags.

The U.S. Forest Service made a huge attempt to right the wrong with the "Wildlife Tree" project in which the folks in federal prisons made four- by 4-inch aluminum wildlife signs that wildlife biologists placed on standing snags announcing them to be absolutely essential as nesting habitat for wildlife and warning: "Do Not Cut!"

In fact, back in the '70s when I was working for the USFS, one of my jobs was walking portions of timber sales searching out appropriate snags and placing wildlife signs on them to ensure they'd be saved for cavity-nesters. And you know, not too many years back I was driving past one of the old sales and sure enough, those

wildlife trees were still standing and doing what they were supposed to do.

Anyway... the vanishing of cavity nesting substrate also increased when the steel fence posts appeared on the market. All those old wooden fence posts that woodpeckers pounded holes into were gone and one bird in particular, the eastern bluebird, almost went extinct because of it.

What saved them was the nesting box builders from the Atlantic to the Mississippi river who gave them homes.

There's nothing like having a bluebird nesting box in your backyard — unless you have an outdoor cat — then forget it, or put a bird-be-safe collar on it. A swallow nesting box will be a welcome asset if you live near a mosquito-producing body of water. You can also put up a bat shelter and have bats fluttering about at night helping with the mosquito-reduction business.

It would also be cool to see if butterfly shelters work; California tortoise shells (which I find in my wood pile) and mourning cloaks winter over as adults and are always looking for a safe place to spend those cold times.

If you live in Camp Sherman, put up a nesting box for a northern pygmy



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Look out world, here I come! Nestling American kestrel about to fledge. Nesting box by Don McCartney.

owl — you'll have a wonderful opportunity for one to move in and positively ruin your afternoon nap with all their tooting. Those ambitious little owls are capable of catching, killing and eating pine squirrels and other critters that size.

Building and erecting

nesting boxes is a great way to help wildlife prosper, and for you to have the satisfaction of seeing your handiwork create immediate and long-lasting positive results.

To get plans, email me (jimnaturalist@gmail.com) for the pdf digital version. Now get busy!

Sisters salutes...

• Sisters School District sent out a thank you out to Ray's Food Place for donating grocery bags for material pickups for all three schools last week (see story, page 1). Gary Thorson of SSD said, "They were a huge help this past week."

• The community of Sisters owes a tip of the hat to all the workers in the grocery and sundries marketplace, the pharmacists, the people pumping gas — all those who have worked so hard over the past several weeks to keep shelves stocked and essential services and goods coming to the folks who live here. They have more exposure than most of the rest of us, and they keep showing up — and keep everyone's spirits up, too.

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