

# THE OBSERVER

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December 14, 2021

TUESDAY EDITION

\$1.50

**UNION COUNTY**

## Researchers consider reasons for decline of mule deer

By **KATY NESBITT**  
For EO Media Group

**STARKEY** — A study looking into predator-prey interaction at the Starkey Experimental Forest and Range in Union County revealed fascinating insight into more than predation on deer and elk, such as the dynamics between competing carnivores.

To answer why mule deer are declining at Starkey and across Northeastern Oregon, researchers are looking at possible contributors, including the role of predators. According to OSU associate professor Taal Levi, who served as an adviser to a 2016-2020 study led by Joel Ruprecht, an Oregon State University wildlife science doctoral student, the study included collaring a sampling of carnivores, monitoring deer and elk kill sites via game cameras and analyzing scat to determine what predators living within the 40-square-mile experimental forest and range were eating.

The Starkey forest is encompassed within a fence that keeps deer and elk confined to the area, which allows unique types of research.

“Getting at the answer is a little bit challenging because mule deer compete with elk and are preyed on by multiple species,” Levi said.

Of the bears, cougars, bobcats and coyotes collared and monitored, Levi said the most interesting results occurred between cougars and coyotes.

“We learned that while coyotes tend to avoid cougars, they are strongly attracted to cougar kill sites,” he said.

Analyzing their scat provided further evidence that coyotes are eating elk. Levi said coyotes don’t typically kill elk past their young calf stage, but video recordings showed more than 90% of cougar kills were scavenged by coyotes.

This method of eating out is not without its challenges for the opportunistic coyotes. Levi said 7% of the dead coyotes discovered during the study were found at cougar kill sites, and between 20% and 23% of the Starkey coyotes were killed by cougars.

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# A helping hand

## La Grande author connects with refugee in Rwanda

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

**L**A GRANDE — It is a mystery for which an answer may never emerge.

About two years ago a biography by La Grande author Terrie Biggs unexplainably appeared in a refugee camp in Rwanda.

“I still have no idea how it got there,” Biggs said.

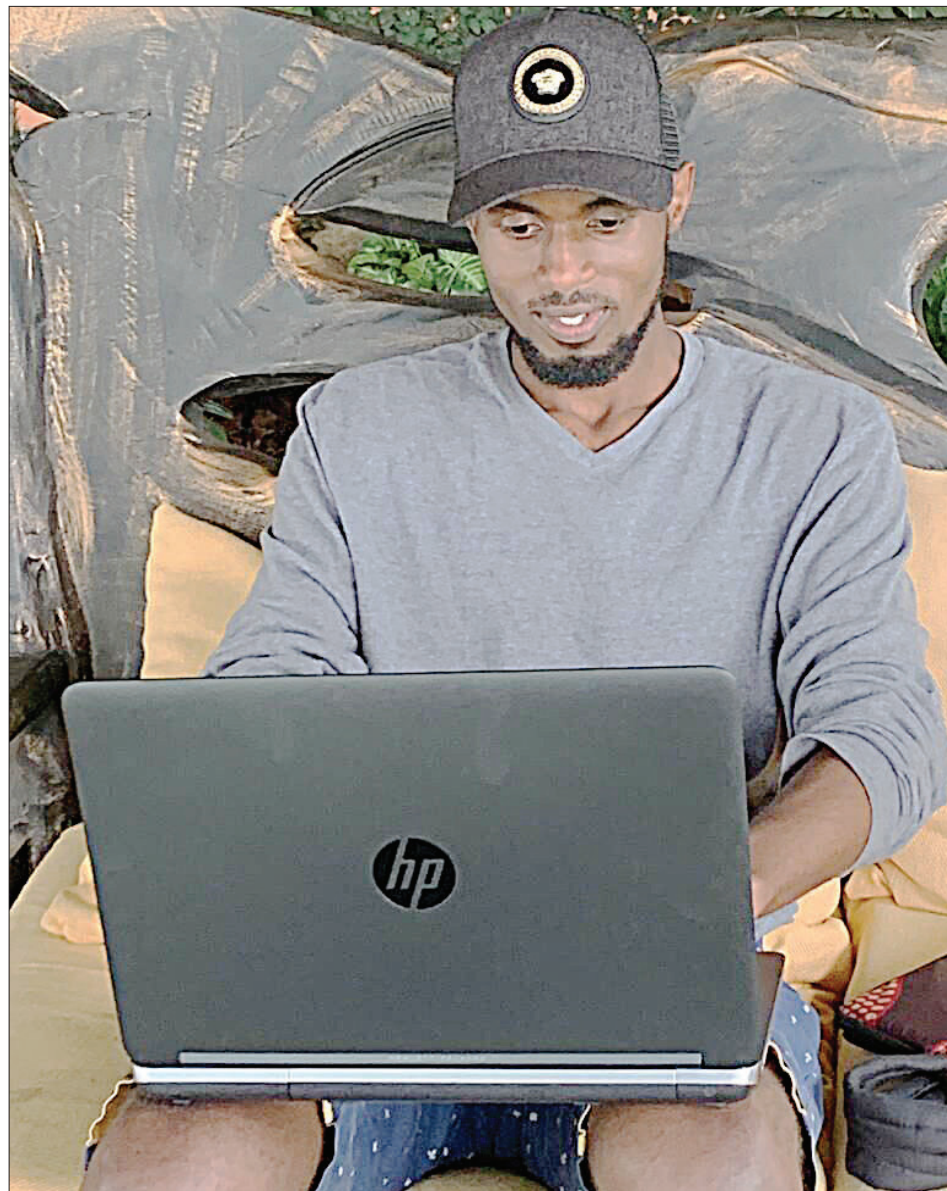
The author, however, does know that she will be forever thankful for the book’s inexplicable presence in the refugee camp. It triggered a chain of events that put her in a position to help make a pivotal impact in the life of Innocent Nshimiye, 24, a lifelong resident of the Kiziba Refugee Camp near the city of Kigali in Rwanda.



Biggs

Biggs first learned that her 2013 biography of renowned stylistic dancer Bali Ram, titled “Bali Ram: Rhythm of Nature,” had appeared in the Kiziba Refugee Camp when she received a Facebook message from Nshimiye telling her that a friend had a copy of the book. Nshimiye had not read the book, but said that he was inspired by what he had heard of the story. The book told of Ram, a poor boy in Nepal who grew up to gain international recognition. That story inspired Nshimiye to contact Biggs and ask her to send a copy.

Biggs and Nshimiye began communicating via email exchanges, which shed more light on the African’s life story. Biggs learned that books weren’t readily available at his camp. There was only a small library that books could not be



Innocent Nshimiye/Contributed Photo

Innocent Nshimiye is shown in Rwanda with a laptop computer that Terrie Biggs, of La Grande, purchased for him. The laptop is making it possible for Nshimiye, who has lived in a refugee camp his entire life, to attend college online.

checked out from. She also discovered that Nshimiye wanted to become a public speaker, so she mailed him, in addition to her Ram biography, two Dale Carnegie books about public speaking, plus other books meant to inspire him, including one about the Dali Lama.

The books were mailed by Biggs to Rwanda in December but they did not arrive until April.

For Nshimiye, the wait was worth it. He and his friends found the details

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## Oregon’s population is booming, but not with kids

By **FEDOR ZARKHIN**  
The Oregonian

**SALEM** — The past decade brought many things to Oregon: economic recovery from the Great Recession, surging household incomes and some of the nation’s biggest population gains.

What it did not deliver: more children.

Even as Oregon added more than 400,000 adults from 2010 to 2020, resulting in an overall population spike of 10.6%, the number of children remained virtually unchanged.

In fact, Oregon reported only 151 more children age 17 or younger last year than it did a decade earlier, according to an analysis by The Oregonian of 10-year Census data.

“It’s pretty interesting. Probably something that people don’t expect,” said Charles Rynerson, a Portland State University researcher studying population trends. “However, it was entirely predictable.”

Oregon is one of 30 states nationally that recorded no growth, or even declines, in its number of children over the past decade, while other states — including Washington — posted



The Associated Press, File

The neon White Stag sign along the river in Portland that formerly said “Made in Oregon” now says “Portland, Oregon.”

gains in their respective kid counts.

Oregon’s population is aging, a slow-motion phenomenon that could have major ramifications for the economy and society at large. Oregon’s youth population grew by about 20,000 between 2000 and 2010, but the falloff has been pronounced since around

the Great Recession, as more women choose to delay child-birth, teen pregnancies fell and some potential parents decide to have fewer or no children at all.

What’s less predictable is whether the trend will hold — and what happens if it does. As has long been known, as the baby boomers age, they will need ser-

vices provided by young, working-aged people. With fewer children today to grow into adults by the time that happens, there could be an imbalance.

Of 4.2 million Oregonians, 866,604 — or 20.5% — are children. A decade ago, it was 22.6%.

“If these trends hold, Oregon will be an older, grayer state,” said University of Oregon economics professor Tim Duy. “And the economy will reflect that.”

### Declining births

While the downward trend in births has been apparent for some time, why it’s happening is not so clear.

“That’s a less straightforward question,” Rynerson said.

It’s among questions that Alison Gemmill of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health has dedicated her career to — trying to figure out why fewer women are having children and whether they’ll have kids later or never at all.

Since 2005, Oregon saw the seventh largest drop in birth rates of any state, federal data show. And at the current average

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**WEATHER** Full forecast on the back of B section

	<b>Tonight</b>		<b>Wednesday</b>
	<b>14 LOW</b>		<b>30/29</b>
	Colder		A little snow

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Issue 146  
2 sections, 16 pages  
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**THURSDAY**

COVE STANDOUT TO PLAY SOCCER AT UNIVERSITY OF MARY

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