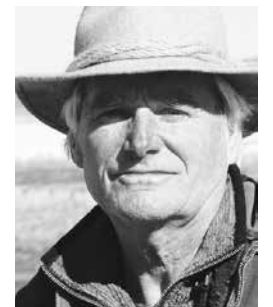


BIRD EXPLORER

Woodpecker holes and owls

BY PETER J. THIEMANN



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Photo, top left: Four young Western Screech Owls (WSOs) in Lithia Park. Young WSO (above) peeking out of snag hole, and adult WSO (bottom left) roosting in woodpecker cavity on the author's property in the Applegate.



only so much space in the entrance hole.

One evening I thought I could see two young in the same snag hole, but it was dark and there was not enough light for a photo.

In Ashland's Lithia Park, I saw and photographed four young WSOs at the same nest (see photo), but the owls on my land in the Applegate did not cooperate—they

never let me see how many there were.

Like all owls, WSOs perform a vital role in nature's balance, and, as landowners and guardians of public lands, we can encourage the owls to continue by following these recommendations:

- Do not remove all dead tree snags. Look for woodpecker holes—those cavities can provide homes for owls.
- Do not use rodent poison and limit the use of pesticides to encourage a healthy owl population.

A vibrant forest needs dead trees to provide balance and homes for creatures.

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Photos courtesy of Peter J. Thiemann flicker photo stream.

has to be softened by decay. The structural integrity of the snag has to be maintained for it to keep standing, so as some fall, others have to take over.

I live in a

riparian zone along a small creek that feeds into the Applegate River. This zone has an abundance of willows, red alders, big-leaf maples, and some cottonwoods.

A few Douglas firs have grown near the creek, some to impressive heights. This species is prone to periodic beetle infestation on my land and some are now dead. A windstorm blew off the top two-thirds of a large dead Douglas

fir and left a sizable snag standing, which is ideally suited for woodpeckers to drill their cavities. A Northern Flicker family did just that and nested in the snag for several seasons.

Last year and again this year, a family of Western Screech Owls (WSO) moved into the woodpecker cavity and raised its young. The telltale signs of owl occupancy were adult WSOs roosting mornings and evenings with their heads sticking out of the entrance hole.

In 2015 and again this year, young owls showed up peeking out of the hole. Careful observation made it possible to tell young apart from adults as my photos show. I was curious to see how many young the owls had, but there was

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