

BIRD EXPLORER

Great Gray Owl rescue

BY PETER J. THIEMANN



Peter J. Thiemann



Rescued Great Gray Owl

This is a story of a successful owl rescue and rehabilitation at Wildlife Images in Grants Pass.

Earlier this winter a male Great Gray Owl was found on a mountain road, disoriented and injured. X-ray

exams at Wildlife Images showed wing damage consistent with an automobile collision. This is the most common cause of injury for this species because they perch on low fence posts and fly low over rural roads.

The prognosis for full recovery for this owl was guarded. But after wing stabilization to encourage healing, good nutrition, and weeks of flight training, the Great Gray Owl was judged fit to return to the wild. I had been following the owl's progress and was given a release date of early December.

The plan was to release the injured owl near Butte Falls, where he had been found. So on a Sunday after an overnight snowfall, we took the owl to Willow Lake at about 4,000 feet elevation and searched for a suitable release area near water with some meadows and a mature forest. We found open space with some dead trees for perching. It was important to have some easy landing trees nearby so that the owl could land after his initial release to be able to orient himself and choose a flight path into the forest.

This is exactly what happened. By giving the owl some lift upon release, he was able to fly to a nearby tree, land on a branch about 20 feet up, and look around. After allowing all who were there to take some photographs, he flew off into the snow-covered trees and never looked back. What a sight—*free and wild!*

From March through May, we will conduct our yearly Great Gray Owl nest platform surveys and will invite some birders to come along.

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Photo, above left: Recovered Great Gray Owl about to be released at Willow Lake. Photo, above right: Upon release, the owl will land on a nearby tree branch to choose its flight path into the forest. Photos courtesy of Peter J. Thiemann flickr photo stream.

The Gray Hairstreak butterfly streaks by

BY LINDA KAPPEN

The Gray Hairstreak (*Strymon melinus*), a very common butterfly of the Lycaenidae family, is found in all of the contiguous US states and throughout southern Canada.

The adult Gray Hairstreak can have up to a one-and-a-half-inch wingspread. The upper wings (dorsal view) are deep slate-blue with a bright orange patch between the two tails on each wing. One tail is very short; the other is a longer, prominent tail. The underside (ventral view) is soft gray with bands of black bars outlined in white. Orange spots have black/blue spots within and are near the tails. The tail, with its hair-like extensions, fools predators into thinking it is the head of the butterfly.

The Gray Hairstreak is just that—a gray streak flashing by with its streak-like pattern and rapid flight, speeding from one spot to another.

Habitat

Their habitat is usually open, non-forested sites. They are common in disturbed, weedy areas; they are not seen in deep forests or very cold climates.

Breeding happens in lower elevations near riparian areas of rivers, streams, and fields. Males will sit on shrubs waiting to eye a female. The female will lay its eggs on a wide variety of host plants in every region, using many host plants within the different families of plants, thus making them the most successful generalists. A few of the most common hostplants for the Gray Hairstreak in the Pacific Northwest are mallows, clovers, buckwheats, docks, oaks, vetches, and many other members of the pea family.

The chrysalides overwinter, and, with an early spring emergence, up to three broods are possible. The flight period is

very long—we can see Gray Hairstreaks from March to October. In a recent year with a very mild winter, I spent New Year's Day at the southern Oregon coast. On grassy hills above the ocean, I saw two Gray Hairstreaks near the top by the coastal woods. On the same day I saw a Common Buckeye. When coastal weather is mild here, a few species can fly about more often.

Nectar sources

Nectar sources are many: flowers of alfalfa, spreading dogbane, rabbitbrush, mint, purple loosestrife, goldenrod, buckwheat, and just about any bloom in the vicinity of their flight. I have seen the Gray Hairstreak on islands of poison oak at the Ashland Imperatrice Hills to the banks of the Rogue River near Galice, where they feast on a variety of riverbank blooms, most often narrowleaf milkweed. One can get a close look as the Gray Hairstreaks nectar in the sun, rubbing their tails back and forth.

Fun fact

The Gray Hairstreak is known to be in the top ten Lycaenid species with a successful symbiotic relationship with ants. The larvae of the Gray Hairstreak secrete a sweet honey-like liquid. Ants will drink this liquid and, in turn, will protect the larvae from predators.

The photo shown here was taken in the Applegate School Butterfly Habitat on swamp milkweed, where I can usually count on seeing a few during the season.

Check your blooming flowers throughout the early spring to late summer for this small beauty, which is fun to watch up close.

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Gray Hairstreak butterfly on swamp milkweed at Applegate School. Photo: Linda Kappen.

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Happy Mother's Day!