

It Takes a Village To Raise an Owl

Shannon Poynter's border collie discovered it first – a grapefruit-sized mound of grayish fluff lying on the forest succession trail in the Tyrrell Seed Orchard south of Lorane. Poynter, co-owner of Hey Bayles! Farm, recognized the creature as a baby owl and paused in her daily run to scoop it up. "I ran all the way home with it wrapped in my T-shirt," she said in the first of several phone calls – attempts to reunite baby "Louie" with his parents.

Spring is, as Frost observed, nature's "hardest hue to hold," and it occasionally loses its grip on baby owls. Orphaned by logging or hay machines – or simply by falling out of the nest – the tiny birds may require human assistance in order to survive.

A bird of prey has a difficult first year, what with learning to hunt, navigating possible predators and flying into barbed-wire fences or cars. Faced with an injured raptor, Lane County residents invariably flock to help, showing that it sometimes takes a village to raise an owl.

Laurin Huse of Cascades Raptor Center set the big-eyed bird gently on her exam table for an check-up. She determined that he'd fallen from his nest; the spongy duff of the trail possibly cushioned him from breaks to his wing- or leg-bones. CRC's executive director, Louise Shimmel, explained how to offer the owl bits of mouse from forceps. "Stand behind him when you feed," she told my husband, longtime CRC volunteer Jonathan Smith, "so he won't see you and imprint on humans."

Jonathan, a photographer employed at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, fed the bird up and made a date with Poynter to scour the Seed Orchard's trail for adult great-horned owls the next day. Toting his laptop and a CD called "Voices of North American Owls," he hiked into the forest. "We'll play 'Fledgling Begging Call,'" he told Poynter, who stopped near a 50-foot fir.

"I found the baby right here," she said, "but I can't find the nest." She backtracked toward Jonathan's laptop propped on a stone and looked up. "Wait." She pointed. "Is that it?"

He peered up at the loose configuration of sticks and what looked to be dirt-clods, 30 feet up in the branches of the Doug fir. "Possibly," he said, and cued his computer. An unearthly screeching filled the forest, silencing songbirds. He scanned the sky. "If the parents are still around, and they hear this sound, they'll fly to the nest."

But they didn't, not even when he played a solid hour of Fledgling Begging Call on a loop. "I'll go make a call," he told Poynter. But in his car outside Lorane Market and Deli, his cell phone lost signal.

"Well, sure, you can use the phone," the deli owner told him. Munching on one of her M&M-studded ranger cookies on the sunlit patio, Jonathan called Scott Altenhoff, city arborist, who volunteers to climb trees whenever CRC needs a nest scoped out or a baby redeposited.

"I'll be up at first light," Altenhoff promised. The next morning, he shouldered a backpack of climbing equipment and followed Jonathan and his laptop into the forest. He set up lines and prepared to ascend the fir. "I'll take photos of the nest so you can see what it looks like," he said and gracefully ascended, via cable and pulley, up into the tree.

"Doesn't look good," he called down. "No food scraps, no pellets." He examined the area, and eased himself onto the ground. "No sign of the parents," he concluded.

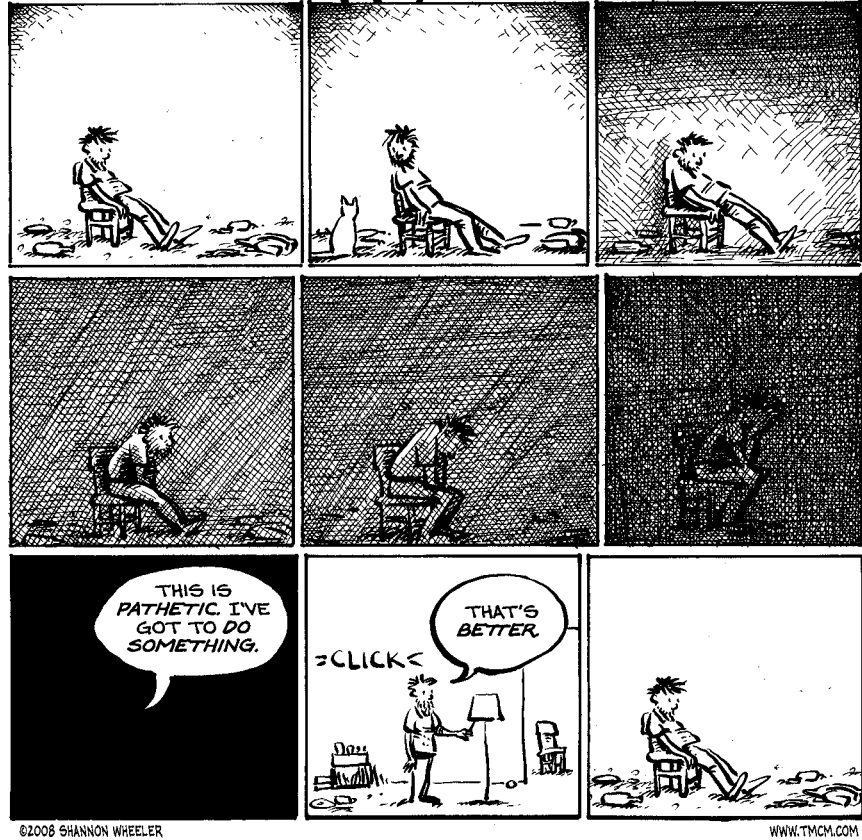
Jonathan packed up his laptop and returned to Shimmel, undaunted. "What's the next step?" he asked.

Enter Juno and Lorax. The two great-horned owls, each with a permanent injury, reside in a spacious enclosure at CRC. They'll teach Louie how to be a bird. Right now, volunteers wear ghost costumes while feeding him. "We want him to like the costume and not us," Shimmel explains. But as soon as he's old enough to eat from a plate on his own, he'll move out of the clinic and in with his foster mothers. Over the summer, when he's proven his ability to fly and catch live prey in the center's 50-foot flight arena, Jonathan will return him to the Seed Farm. Then, Poynter may well hear his melodious call on her evening runs and know that she – along with a caring community – helped an owl to survive.



Scott Altenhoff ascends the fir

How to Be Happy (OPERA ORIGIN) by Shannon Wheeler



Letters TO THE EDITOR

USELESS COMMISSIONERS

The problem of power is how ... to get men of power to live for the public rather than off the public. — Robert F. Kennedy

Lane County commissioners receive a salary of \$72,000 per year, and with staff and benefits their cost is probably well over \$100,000 per year. This is costing us, the taxpayers, more than half a million dollars per year for this commission. After years they still seem to have only two solutions for the county's financial problem: Cut services or impose additional taxes on the lower and middle income taxpayers.

In the 1973-75 budget cycle, corporations paid 18.5 percent of all income taxes. In the 2005-07 budget cycle, corporations are expected to pay just 4.6 percent of Oregon's income taxes. It is projected by 2009-11, corporations are expected to pay 4.4 percent of Oregon income taxes.

In 1999 House Bill 3575 was stealthily passed, granting forest owners of more than 5,000 acres another unearned scoop of tax relief by gradually abolishing their timber harvest taxes. The affect, reported in *The Oregonian*, costs the state education fund \$58 million. Last year, it is estimated that we lost a total of somewhere between \$100,000 to \$200,000. And then there is the special property tax relief estimated to amount in the billions!

With the above thoughts in mind, the commissioners need to represent the "people" and urge our state and federal representatives to right this wrong. Urge them to return to "fair" taxation! And if they cannot become creative for the half a million dollars that we pay them each year, then they should also cut the board of commission from five to three. Let's be fair!

Ron Davis
Cottage Grove

herself as a volunteer and a "classroom teacher" phone on behalf of Sen. Clinton to pitch for my support. When I said that I wasn't sure yet that and that I truly hadn't decided, she proceed to piss all over Obama to make me see how Clinton would be the better choice. When I told her that this behavior of hers was not helping her cause, she tried pissing on Obama a little more.

I told her that I had the ballot on my desk and that she'd decided this for me; I was voting for Obama. She proceeded to try to lay guilt trips on me about how it was all my decision and "Well, I hope you can live with your decision!" shortly before she hung up on me.

Jeezus, you'd think they'd train people that are volunteering NOT to be obnoxious twits (or maybe some other vowel). Without her help, I would've probably gone with Clinton, but not after this. I really did just complete my ballot for Obama simply because the volunteer was so distasteful.

John Hedtke
Eugene

NEBRASKA SKUNK POSE

I wasn't aware there was a "tornado in a Mason jar" controversy about the American Apparel ads in your paper until I read the letter to the editor in your May 8 edition. I don't know if this latest ad is the same as an earlier one, but it is hilariously funny for someone who recently moved here from the High Plains.

The poor model's pose is classic Nebraska skunk! A recommended position when one is suffering from severe abdominal cramps due to an oversupply of intestinal gas.

The image brings to mind one of my grandmother's old sayings: "Fools' names and fools' faces, often seen in public places."

I hope the poor girl is feeling better

Morgan Songi
Eugene

OBNOXIOUS TWITS

I just had some woman who identified

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