

INVASION OF THE NICHE SNATCHERS

Curbing invasive animal species can help restore delicate local ecosystems

BY REBECCA LEXA

In my last two columns, I outlined the issue of invasive plant species and their disastrous effects on local ecosystems, including some common invasive plants found in the Columbia-Pacific region. In this next installment, I'll cover some local invasive animal species.

Some animals are considered invasive when they are introduced to ecosystems that they haven't evolved in along with other species. Sometimes these animals have moved from different continents, and because they are ecosystem newcomers, there often aren't any predatory species that can keep them in check. Moreover, if an invasive species once occupied a partic-

ular ecological role, or niche, where it previously lived, it may hijack a similar niche filled by a native species after moving.

One local example of this can be found in the Eurasian collared dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), which entered the United States a few decades ago when a pet shop released 50 captive doves. While this species looks similar to the mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), it is larger and has a dark band on the back of its neck that gives it its name. It competes with native birds like the mourning dove for food and nesting sites, and in some places may push them out entirely.

The European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) is another well-known invasive species. This small bird can be easily distinguished by its dark, iridescent feathers, which are coupled with pale spots. The starling was first introduced to New York's Central Park in the 1890s by a group that

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Don Henise

The American bullfrog can be found throughout Oregon.

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The Eurasian collared dove is often mistaken for similar looking native species, such as the mourning dove.