



ANDREW CLARK

A SLICE OF LIFE

Birdwatching and surviving a potentially dicey situation

Barbara and I are birdwatchers. Our experience has been that anywhere in the world you may go — Barbara has traveled, lived and/or worked in 56 nations, and I'm a poor second to her with only 32 — there are wonderful, interesting and beautiful birds to be found.

Birding takes you out into nature and knits together the various places you go. Additionally, we birders see much more than just birds. Because we are focused on small movements, all sorts of amphibians, small mammals, bugs, reptiles and invertebrates are seen too. But sometimes, on rare occasion, things might get a bit dicey and/or actually saddening.

Following is part of a letter I wrote to Barbara from Uganda some years ago.

"Well, tonight I am absolutely thrilled and delighted — and very saddened.

"I'm at the same guesthouse where on my last trip here I saw the Great Blue Turacos and their nest with three horrendously ugly babies, an enormous treat because this bird is a Holy Grail species for me.

This evening when birds began to move toward roosting, I got my binoculars and point/shoot camera and went walking. The first place checked was the big tree where I saw the Turacos last time, and as I came close a quite large bird dropped out of the tree and flew away. Dang!! It might have been a Great Blue but was just a silhouette. I was about to begin a full-blown heartbroken lament when a second one flew and yes! Great Blues. I hustled in the direction they went, found them in a big tree and got photos. A wonderful treat and what I am thrilled about tonight.

I wandered along several streets and coming along a nice tree-lined road, there in a tree at a road corner was another pair! I was taking more photos when a passing Ugandan stopped and said, "Don't do that — this is the statehouse grounds. They will arrest you!!"

Hmmmmmm. Interesting. I went along a few meters further to where the road went along a very large and well-groomed lawn surrounded by a substantial fence. A uniformed soldier of the Uganda People's Defense Force equipped with a large machine gun was whistling and shouting at me. I stopped.

This is a potentially dangerous situation — these guys can be jumpy.

This, I thought, is a time to be pleasant, polite and compliant.

"What are you doing?" he asked. "I'm looking at those beautiful birds — aren't they wonderful?" I responded. "I'm a birdwatcher and they are really a special treat for me to see."

The soldier asked inquired about my binoculars and demanded I hand them over. He carefully examined the binoculars, around and around and back and forth.

The sun has lowered now and I glance up and see three Great Blue Turacos sitting on a branch in a small open space of a huge tree, facing me with the evening sunshine high-lighting them. What a photo-op — a perfectly lit, fabulous pose of a wondrous subject. I'm thrilled to see these glorious birds and horrified that I'm going to have to walk away without getting a photo of them. He looks through the binoculars from the wrong end.

I do not correct him, and then he says, "This is just a binoculars — not a camera?"

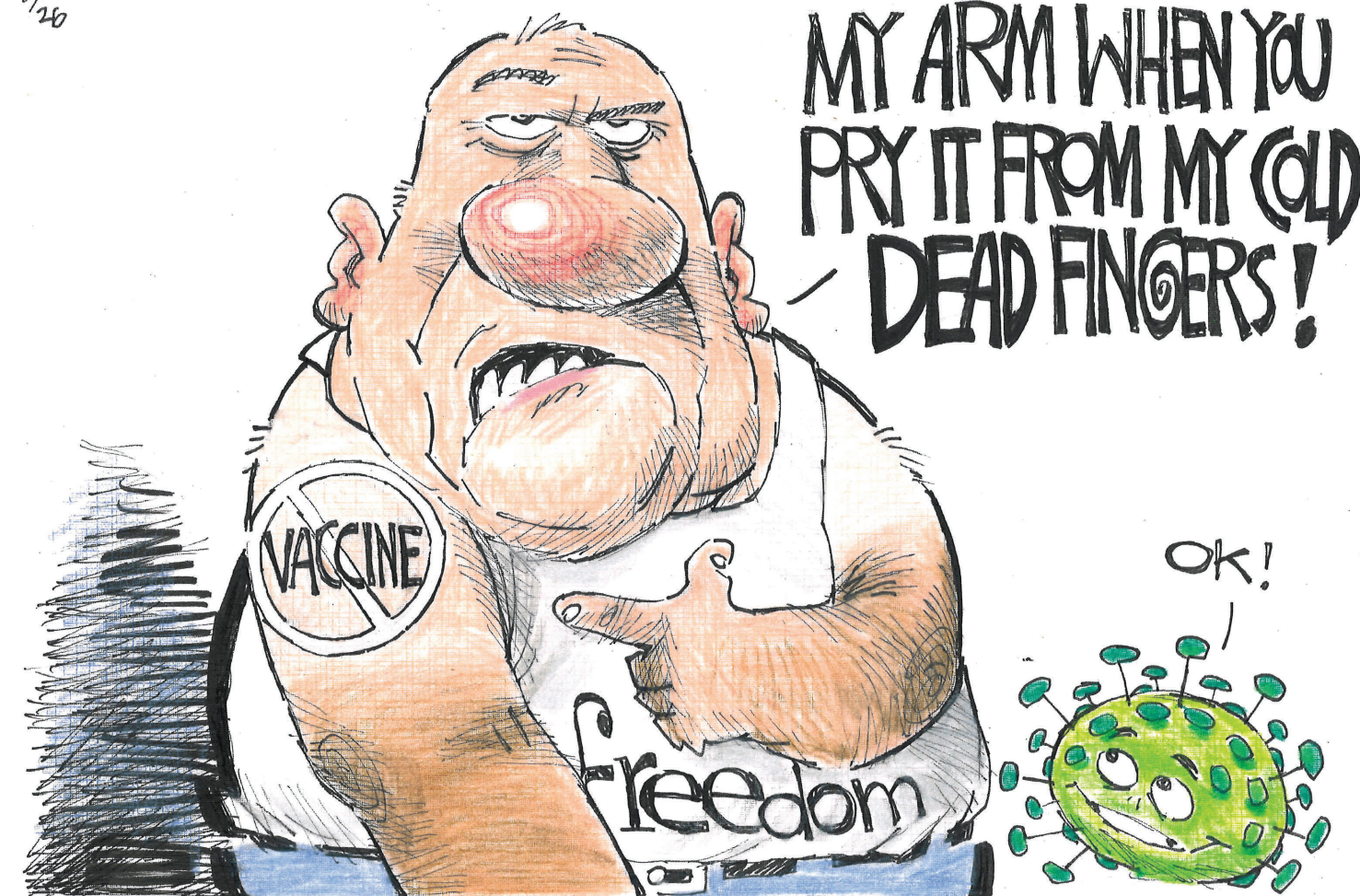
"Yes, just binoculars," I replied. He hands them back to me and sends me on my way. Another soldier has come and joins the conversation, and he agrees that it is OK for me to go.

Their job is protecting the president. They are doing it well and that is to be respected. We chat a bit more in friendly fashion, then part company in good humor and I go my way right along the edge of the statehouse lawn where the president of Uganda lives. And my little point/shoot camera with the other photos is still in my shirt pocket.

I had to walk away from one of the most perfect bird photo opportunities I've ever had. A beautiful evening-sunlit line of three Great Blue Turacos, shoulder-to-shoulder on an open branch in a lovely huge tree, looking down at me. And that is why I am so saddened tonight.

Dr. Andrew Clark is a livestock veterinarian with both domestic and international work experience who lives in Pendleton.

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Time to load up on school supplies

It's back-to-school time. After this last year, our children experienced many futuristic forms of back to school. Very few were what we would consider normal with the pandemic happening around us. The question is: What will school look like this coming fall? For the most part, something more traditional. Some good and not-so-good strategies happened over the past school year. Now we'll see which ones remain and which ones do not.

One thing that won't change for sure and is so important to kids is school supplies. The excitement of what is to come, the organizing of new pencils, rulers, crayons and scissors marks the beginning of school. The anticipation for that first day of school and the days ahead makes this an exciting time of the year for children.

The beginning of the school year is also an excellent learning opportunity for kids with the planning and anticipation, evaluating and adjusting they are, full of questions as they anticipate the coming school year. It can be frustrating for parents, however.

Use this time to expand your children's minds. Students after first grade should be able to create their own supply lists. Ask them to calculate what the cost would be for you. You can also provide them with an amount to spend (budget) and create their shopping list. Don't limit it to just school supplies. Clothing is an important part as well. That simple activity provides your



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child with the opportunity to use multiple life skills that will provide a strong foundation for not only

the school year ahead but lifelong understanding of shopping and the opportunity to guide them. It reinforces their writing skills as they create their lists. It forces them to use evaluative skills as they decide which items would be best. Having to stay within their budget amount or even just letting you know how much it will cost forces the use of math skills.

Preschool, kindergarten and first grade students have not had exposure to school supply preparation, but they are aware of it and get excited. Time and conversation with them are pivotal in the building of their understanding and for developing life skills. They are also able to start making some guided choices. Giving them the options between which pencils they would like to buy and telling you why they made their choice builds their understanding of language at their level. Ask questions such as, "What do you think you will be using these scissors for at school?"

We live in a busy world, and there are times as adults and parents that our "to-do" list is so long it seems easier to go get school supplies bought and ready for kids. If this happens, there are still ways to build that experience with your child. Have them check and see if what you bought matches the list from the school. You can have the kids add up what you spent by using the receipt and locating the price. They can check to make sure everything you bought is there (pull something out and leave it in the car and have them find it). These are life problem-solving skills your children will always use, and the activity makes for significant interaction with them. It may even keep them busy and give you a chance to catch up on other items.

Setting a couple of hours aside to take your children school shopping is one of the biggest keys to making this activity a success. Having them create their list before going will provide discussion points and boundaries that should make for an enjoyable experience. As busy parents, we want the job done, but don't miss an opportunity for you and your child that they may carry on when their children are headed to school.

Scott Smith is a 40-plus year Umatilla County educator and serves on the Decoding Dyslexia Oregon board as its parent/teacher liaison.

The tug of forces in Taliban leadership

Great are the unknowns about a returned Taliban leadership in Afghanistan. Are their leaders today more worldly, peaceful and pragmatic or just using diplomatic words to mask their traditional draconian ideology and their disparate factions?

Here's what little we do know. Continued wariness should be the watchword.

Taliban Leadership Council ("Quetta shura"): Supreme Leader Mawlawi Halbattullah Aktundzada was chosen emir in 2016 to replace deceased Taliban founder Mullah Omar. Aktundzada's prestige as an Islamic legal scholar and judge was thought of use in keeping Taliban factions together. He is a strong proponent of the oft-used Taliban tactic of suicide bombings (his own son died as one). Yet of late, he has permitted negotiations with the U.S. and exhorted fighters to practice good governance. He reportedly lives near Quetta, Pakistan.

Deputy leader Sirajuddin Haqqani is extremely anti-American. He inherited his father's military and intelligence network on the porous Pakistan-Afghanistan border, continuing close relations with al-Qaeda figures, as well as with Pakistan's intelligence services. The Haqqani Network's signature brand of urban terrorist attacks continue today, and it is a U.S.-designated terrorist organization.

Worrisomely, he and other family members are now in Kabul, expecting major roles in a new government and its security and intelligence apparatus.

Military leader Mullah Muhammad Yaqoub (in his late 30s) is the son of Mullah Omar. He is considered important as one of the architects of the recent military campaign.



HARRIET ISOM

OTHER VIEWS

Political deputy Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar is the most public face today of the Taliban because of his highly visible diplomatic role for the Taliban, including in Doha, Qatar for the peace negotiations with the U.S. government during the Trump and Biden administrations.

I have puzzled over why Baradar is considered a Taliban moderate. He was a co-founder along with Mullah Omar of the ultra-conservative Taliban and long served as Omar's principal deputy. Moreover, Baradar was the key military strategist for the Taliban's coming to power in Kabul in 1996. And by the time the U.S. ousted the Taliban in 2001, he was deputy minister of defense with a reputation for brutal repressions.

In 2001 he fled to Pakistan, ever the safe haven for the Taliban, and is credited with successfully reorganizing the Taliban to fight a guerrilla war against the U.S. and NATO. Then he was arrested by the Pakistanis in 2010, undoubtedly with U.S. government pressure, and jailed for eight years, which crushed his chances of succeeding Mullah Omar in 2016.

Somber, bespectacled, with a long beard, Baradar in negotiations in Doha is described as quiet, contained and non-confrontational in tone. Other descriptions about him over the years are "cunning" and "difficult to read."

How he relates to Emir Aktundzada, to the other deputies, to today's younger field commanders and even to the influential Pakistan intelligence services is unknown in current Western press accounts.

Karzai/Baradar: His current image as a Taliban peace builder lie in his connec-

tions to former Afghan president Hamid Karzai (2001-14). They are Pashtuns from the very same area of southern Afghanistan and, importantly, the historical record shows several Baradar efforts to negotiate his own peace deals with Karzai, starting in 2001.

Karzai reportedly recommended Baradar as a Taliban negotiator to U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, who then persuaded Pakistan to release him in 2018 for the Doha talks. Khalilzad and Baradar subsequently signed the U.S./Taliban peace agreement in Doha on Feb. 29, 2020 (that the Taliban immediately labeled a US "surrender document").

Following the Taliban's quick takeover of Kabul on Aug. 15, Baradar has arrived for talks with Karzai and other Kabul politicians for establishing an interim government. Baradar reportedly aspires to be president.

How changed? The internationalist Taliban leadership has been adept at promoting an image of strength, moderation and claimed ability to control extremist jihadists. But on the ground in Afghanistan and Pakistan are the Taliban foot soldiers, released jihadist prisoners and newly arriving foreign jihadists who still believe in the merciless rule of old.

Disgruntled jihadists can also join the Taliban's ultra-brutal archrival, the Islamic State (ISIS-K). It just breached Taliban security at the Kabul airport and set off the horrific Aug. 25 suicide bombings that killed 13 American military.

Can the Taliban's leadership therefore pull together a new Afghan government to control the jihadist extremists and run a peaceful, modern-minded Afghanistan? It seems so very doubtful.

Harriet Isom, a former U.S. ambassador and career diplomat who served in Asia and Africa from 1961-96, grew up in Pendleton and has retired to the family ranch.