

c.g.  
**Daytripper**

# Owl in the family

BY JON STINNETT  
*The Cottage Grove Sentinel*

I'd like to tell you about a new family that's moved into our neighborhood. Actually, if neighbors who have lived nearby for a long time are to be believed, what my family and I have witnessed as new arrivals have actually been returning here for years, and they give the term "snow birds" a much more literal connotation.

I'd been catching glimpses of them for a few weeks now, always at twilight, though their shapes and their strange language was unlike anything I'd ever heard — until a chance encounter one evening last week, that is.

After a long Monday of putting together yet another edition of the Sentinel, I found myself walking the short half-mile or so back downtown to retrieve my work camera in hopes of catching a shot of the "Strawberry Moon," a rare full moon that occurred this year on the longest day of the year, the Summer Solstice. After turning the corner onto the next block, I heard an unmistakable loud screech, a sound that has become commonplace this time of night. Looking up into the nearby trees, I observed a large, white bird eyeing me from the treetops, turning its head this way and that as if to size up its visitor. Suddenly, from the alley nearby, an identical bird took flight, its impressive wingspan showing itself as it swooped noiselessly overhead.

A rush of exhilaration overtook me as I continued my walk into town. Retrieving the camera, I took several pictures at All-America City Square and eventually walked back toward home as the full moon towered over Cottage Grove, turning all in its gaze an ethereal shade of silver.

Crossing the railroad tracks, I could already see another bird perched high on a telephone pole several blocks away. Returning to the location of the earlier sighting, I found myself surrounded by no less than five such birds, the moonlight now illuminating them as they swooped from tree to tree. Completely in awe of these creatures and the show they were staging for me alone on such a magical evening, I stood in the alley for what seemed like an eternity before sleep eventually beckoned me back home. There, lying motionless in bed, I heard their telltale screams continue long into the evening.

The next morning, frantic Internet searching convinced me that I had encountered a family of barn owls, or Tyto alba, the most widely distributed species of owl, which is found almost everywhere in the world. Their white, disc-shaped faces help to gather the sound of the rodents and other prey that they hunt at night, and each bird is about 13-15 inches in height.

That much was confirmed to me later by Betsy Glenn, a biologist with the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife stationed in Portland who spends much of her time studying a much rarer species, the Spotted Owl. Glenn said that barn owls are fairly acclimated to humans due to their preference for living in the structures that give them their names. This time of year, barn owls find themselves nesting, and she reasoned that I had been seeing a pair of owls and their young. Young barn owls or owlets appear almost as big as their parents, Glenn said, because they're still covered in a mass of down, and their nighttime squawking can be interpreted as a constant and impatient request for more prey to feed their growing bodies.



A still image captured from a recent video shows a young barn owl outside its nest during the daytime.

Glenn said the owls may have been more active because of the full moon, which I found easy to believe given my earlier encounter. The owls have recovered quite well from the devastating impacts of DDT and other pesticides in the 1970s, she said.

Later, I questioned a few neighbors about the birds, reasoning that they must have also heard them. It turns out that they have been nesting in an industrial-type building a block away for years, returning in about April to raise another brood. The young will likely call Cottage Grove their home until they strike out on their own in about September, Glenn said.

Just about every evening since last Monday, I've brought family and friends into the alley to see these magnificent birds, and we've all marveled at the proximity such a magical creature is willing to share with us. Over the near-decade I've spent in Cottage Grove, encounters with birds have done much to illuminate my knowledge of the changing of the seasons here and the wondrous balance that can exist between nature and humankind. Here's hoping that such encounters can provoke a similar connectedness for you and your families.

## FLEAS

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"I would vacuum my house at least every other day, if not every day, to suck up fleas and their eggs," says Kachadoorian. "Also wash the pet's bedding once a week with hot, soapy water."

The most fastidious cleaning job in the world might not be enough if your pet already has fleas. Persistence in cleaning and early treatment is the key.

There are a number of adult flea control products available on the market, including spot-on topical products that are usually applied monthly. Some of the spot-on products also contain growth regulators that inhibit the development of immature flea life stages. Pets can also be given tablets orally containing these insect growth regulators. Flea collars and ultrasonic devices have had limited success, according to Kachadoorian. Again, a conversation with your veterinarian is an important step to take.

"Most of these products usually work very well," says Kachadoorian. "They are so much more effective than the old days of putting a dust or spray on the animal or giving them a flea bath."

Remember—most of these products are considered to be pesticides. Care and caution is required to use these flea control products because, if used incorrectly, the pet could have a bad reaction.

"You need to read that pesticide label very carefully and make sure you apply the product properly as instructed by the label," says Kachadoorian.

"The label instructions are not part of some marketing gimmick, but are there to protect animals and ensure that fleas are safely killed."

For example, a product's label may say that it is to be used only on dogs. Some active ingredients in products are not toxic to dogs but may be lethal to cats; an example would be permethrin.

Product labels also provide instructions on the appropriate age and weight of the animal being treated.

"There have been instances of people trying to save money by purchasing a product meant for a Great Dane—a large animal—and then splitting that product up to treat smaller animals," says Kachadoorian. "Often, the dosage isn't right and pets can develop medical problems or worse." Use flea combs to pick up fleas, flea eggs, and ticks on puppies and kittens that are too young for flea and tick products. Younger animals and smaller breeds can be particularly sensitive to insecticides.

If your pet experiences a bad reaction from a spot-on product, immediately bathe the pet with mild soap, rinse with large amounts of water, and call your veterinarian. Ask your vet to report the reaction through the National Pesticide Information Center's Veterinary Pesticide Incident Reporting Portal at <http://npic.orst.edu>, or call NPIC at 1-800-858-7378.

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