

Baby hawks bailed from nests during heat wave

■ Wildlife rehabilitation center near Pendleton had a rash of injured hawks to treat following record-setting heat in late June

By Bryce Dole
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The calls flooded into Blue Mountain Wildlife first thing in the morning Monday, June 28 — dozens of baby hawks, desperate to escape the blast of early summer heat, bailed from their nests and plummeted to the ground.

Calls poured in day after day as temperatures pushed beyond 110 degrees across Eastern Oregon. In her 30 years as director of the wildlife rehabilitation center outside of Pendleton, Lynn Tompkins had not seen anything like it.

“They had no choice,” said Tompkins, 68. “It was just too bloody hot to survive.”

In all, the center took in nearly 50 nestling Swainson’s and Cooper’s hawks after they leaped from their nests in the extreme heat wave that baked the Pacific Northwest last week. Thirteen of the raptors suffered injuries severe enough they had to be euthanized.

“We knew the temperature was going to spike beforehand, and we assumed we might get a few more calls,” said Trisha Marquez, a volunteer who fielded the calls and who is Tompkins’ niece. “But we did not expect this at all.”

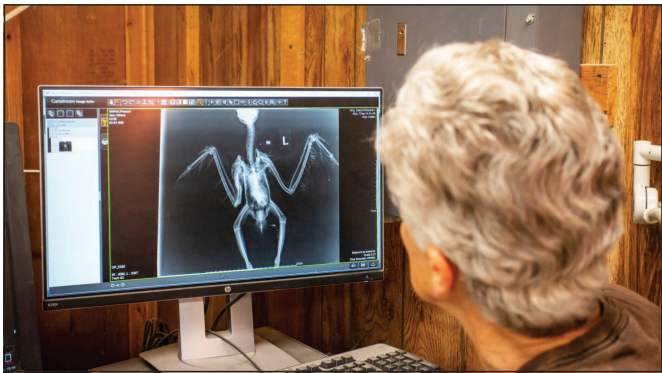
Blue Mountain Wildlife lodged 157 more birds compared to the same day last year. The influx was more than the small staff could handle. They hardly had the space for them all, and eventually they asked people to turn on their sprinklers and hoses and set out pans of water for less-injured birds to cool themselves down.

Tompkins said they will typically see a few injured birds who display this sort of behavior in heat waves around July or August. But this year, with the heat arriving earlier and surging



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Blue Mountain Wildlife Director Lynn Tompkins checks on a group of baby Swainson’s hawks Tuesday, July 6, 2021, at the rehabilitation center just outside Pendleton. The hawks were among those the center received during record-breaking heat wave.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Lynn Tompkins, director of Blue Mountain Wildlife, looks over an X-ray of an injured Swainson’s hawk Tuesday, July 6, 2021. The bird, which the center took in during last week’s record-breaking heat wave, was among those that had to be euthanized.

higher, it caught the babies right in their nesting period.

“The conditions were just right, or wrong,” Tompkins said, adding, “When your normal body temperature is like 100, and it’s 115, you have no way of moderating the temperature except for getting out of there.”

Birds die across Northwest amid heat wave

The birds came from across

the region, including South-eastern Washington, as the wildlife center’s facility in the Tri-Cities took in more than 70, Tompkins said.

And it’s not just happening here. A rehabilitation center in Delta, British Columbia, saw a similar uptick amid the heat wave last week. The center has about 140 more birds than last year at this time, and many babies that flung themselves from their nests didn’t make it, a Vancouver

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— Lynn Tompkins, director, Blue Mountain Wildlife, a wildlife rehabilitation center near Pendleton

news station reported.

In Seattle, state officials began monitoring a colony of Caspian terns last week after dozens of premature seabirds fled their rooftop nests as temperatures reached 108 degrees. Too young to fly, they fell to their death.

Marquez said events such as the heat wave can have a population-wide effect.

“Usually, rehabbers make a difference for one bird at a time,” Marquez said. “Overall, we can have an impact, but this is a whole generation of a species of bird.”

A growing body of research from experts around the

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world suggests as the planet warms due to climate change, species will disappear at an accelerating rate. Some studies suggest the planet has entered its sixth mass extinction of wildlife.

An analysis by scientists from prominent universities across the world, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in 2020, found more than 500 species of land animals are on the brink of extinction and likely will die off within 20 years. That will have a domino effect, the research shows, with interdependent species dying one after another, causing extinction rates to accelerate.

Rehabilitation at work

The heat wave and similar events are what empower Marquez and the volunteers and interns to help out at the wildlife center. Last week, Marquez personally set up nine large sprinklers to keep birds cool. The days stretch from early mornings to late evening, and Tompkins added they are typically eating dinner at 10 p.m. these days.

Volunteers last week met at various checkpoints, from Umatilla to Walla Walla, delivering six to eight birds at a time in boxes before they were brought to the wildlife center, where they are fed and prepared for release.

The premature birds now sit in cages stacked one on top of the other at the center. It’s a cluttered but highly functional facility in a yellow double-wide manufactured home on the rolling blonde foothills of the Blue Mountains between Pendleton and

Pilot Rock. Inside, volunteers and an intern take measurements and jot down notes while scampering around at least four dogs in tight passageways that smell dankly of birds and feed.

Tompkins founded the wildlife center with her husband, who died last March, in 1990. Since then, the facility has grown, now housing a wide array of birds that include eagles, owls, hawks and smaller birds. It also is an educational facility for youths to learn about local wildlife.

Tompkins, an energetic director constantly thinking of what’s next, said the rest of the baby hawks likely will survive for release. For now, she’s just worried about what the feed bill will be, as the babies are voracious eaters.

“What I always tell people is, if you can euthanize an animal and it doesn’t matter, you’ve been doing this too long,” she said, adding, “We were exhausted, but we couldn’t stop every day until we had dealt with everything we could. It wasn’t a fun job, but it had to be done, so we did it.”

Marquez, who came to the wildlife center to help Tompkins after she had hip surgery nearly two months ago, said even though last week was challenging, she found inspiration.

“I’ve been impressed with the amount of people who have called in, caring about the wildlife,” she said. “That gives me a bit of hope. There are caring people who wanted to do something to help and wanted to call in for whatever bird they saw.”

COUNTY

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The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in late March issued the county a civil penalty for three asbestos-related violations.

The two alleged violations that included a proposed fine were:

- \$4,800 for placing material that included asbestos in an open dumpster.
- \$3,600 for removing asbestos-containing material without a license to do so.

The third violation, which does not carry a fine but which DEQ did not rescind, involves the county starting renovation on a building without doing an asbestos survey.

The building, at 2200 Fourth St., houses the Baker County Health Department. The county bought the 5,000-square-foot building from New Directions Northwest, for \$500,000, in August 2020.

County Commissioner Bruce Nichols told the Herald in May 2021 that New Directions, as required by law, disclosed prior to the sale that the building had materials that might contain asbestos.

Asbestos, a known carcinogen, was used in many building materials, including flooring, in past decades.

County Commissioner Chairman Bill Harvey, who is a building contractor, did some of the early demolition work in the building, including removing vinyl flooring in August 2020.

In May, Harvey told the Herald, in response to the DEQ civil penalty, that the flooring he removed and placed in a dumpster did not contain asbestos.

“It’s sad that it took this long to get this resolved. This could have been cleared up immediately. I’m glad to be done with it.”

— Bill Harvey, chairman, Baker County Board of Commissioners



That is true, the DEQ now concedes, in contrast to the civil penalty the agency issued on March 31.

That document reads, in part: “The county removed portions of asbestos containing vinyl flooring without an asbestos abatement license and failed to properly package the resulting waste, leaving it in a dumpster for over three weeks.”

The DEQ’s mistake stems from the agency’s assumption about which flooring in the building contain asbestos, said Laura Gleim, a public affairs specialist for the DEQ’s Eastern Region.

In October 2020, after Harvey and others did the initial demolition work, including removing sections of flooring from the kitchen, an accredited inspector collected samples of flooring from another part of the building. Those samples contained asbestos.

In an email to the Herald, Gleim wrote: “Based upon pictures provided to DEQ from the survey, DEQ assumed that the flooring through the remainder of the building matched what was removed from the kitchen” — including the flooring that Harvey and others removed.

That assumption was wrong.

In her email, Gleim wrote that the county’s attorney provided evidence to DEQ that the flooring in the kitchen area, which Harvey and others removed, matched other sections of flooring that were tested

this spring and do not contain asbestos.

Those sections of flooring are not the same type that a licensed asbestos contractor removed from elsewhere in the building in November 2020. The flooring the contractor removed did contain asbestos, according to DEQ.

The one remaining violation — that the county failed to have an asbestos survey before renovations started, remains.

“However, because it was the county’s first violation of the survey requirement, DEQ did not assess a civil penalty for that violation,” Gleim wrote in her email to the Herald.

Harvey, in a phone interview on Wednesday, July 14, said he knew from the start of the project that the brown vinyl flooring he removed from part of the kitchen area did not contain asbestos because it was only about a decade old, and asbestos was most commonly used in building materials from the 1970s and earlier.

Harvey said he’s “incredulous” at the “shoddy job” the DEQ did in investigating the alleged violations.

“It’s not a good way to conduct business,” he said.

Harvey said he invited DEQ officials last fall to visit the building, offering to show them samples of the flooring he removed, but the agency did not do so.

“It’s sad that it took this long to get this resolved,” Harvey said. “This could have been cleared up immediately. I’m glad to be done with it.”

JET FUEL

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Overall, the administration said, jet fuel inventories in the U.S. are at or above the five-year average, except in the Rocky Mountains, where they are 1% below. That appears to point to the supply chain as the potential problem, various industry officials said.

“COVID, it lulled everybody to sleep,” said Mark Haynes, vice president of sales for Ann Arbor, Michigan-based Avfuel Corporation, which supplies jet fuel across the U.S., including to about half of the nation’s 44 air tanker bases operated by the U.S. Forest Service or U.S. Bureau of Land Management in western states. Some states also maintain tanker bases.

“Our business went to about zero,” Haynes said. “A lot of trucking companies had to lay off (jet fuel) drivers. What happened with the opening up of the U.S., demand for leisure travel has boomed.”

Chris Kunkle is vice president of operations for the Central Coast Jet Center in Santa Maria, California. It’s a private airport known as a fixed based operator that provides services for private jets, such as

refueling. It also serves as a Forest Service air tanker base, and is large enough for DC-10 air tankers.

“In the blink of an eye, we can have a fire here within our response area that can bring in one to three DC-10s and a bunch of variable-sized air tankers,” he said. “We can go from a couple thousand gallons a day to 50,000 to 60,000 gallons.”

He said he likes to keep 60,000 gallons at the airport, but is having trouble with limited deliveries. He fears running out if a large fire breaks out in the area.

Decisions on where the fuel goes can be difficult. Commercial jet travel can be a huge economic driver in many communities. Air ambulances also need fuel. Industry officials said problems at large commercial carriers this year appear to have more to do with worker and pilot shortages than lack of jet fuel.

Jeff Cyphers of Stockton, California-based Humboldt Pacific LCC, said he’s expanding the company’s fleet of 20 jet fuel tanker trucks to transport fuel to West Coast states and, during the wildfire season, Idaho, Montana and Utah. He said there’s currently both a shortage of drivers as well as jet fuel to deliver.



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