

BIRD EXPLORER

Summertime and the bird living is easy

BY PETER J. THIEMANN



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Well, except that the parent birds are extremely busy feeding their young.

Our southern Oregon mountains are home to an amazing variety of avifauna. The climate is favorable, and different bioregions converge in our area. These three “glamour” species (see photos) are not rare and can be found as a common breeding bird: the Golden Eagle, the Great Horned Owl and the Pileated Woodpecker. April and May are the busiest months as the eaglets of Golden Eagles are about two weeks old in mid April, the owlets of Great Horned Owls are four weeks old, and the Pileated Woodpeckers are busy excavating several large nest cavities.

June and early July are the best times for birders to get out there and look. Although these species with their young are a bit harder to find than backyard birds and are often sensitive to

disturbance, with some birding etiquette and time, looking for these birds can be a rewarding experience. Look for mountain cliffs and a soaring large brown bird, and it may be a Golden Eagle. Great Horned Owls can be found on stick nests made by other raptors or ravens, sometimes in cliff caves with ledges. When walking through a tall tree forest, listen to the loud sound of a territorial Pileated Woodpecker drilling in dead tree snags.

I found a Golden Eagle nest in a cottonwood tree near a small stream with meadows adjacent to a hillside. Starlings were nesting in the large eagle nest’s lower apartment! American Kestrels were nesting in the next tree not more than 50 yards away. Western Kingbirds, a large flycatcher, were all around on fence posts. It seems to be an unwritten rule that eagles don’t usually hunt in the immediate area around

their nest, so there were ground squirrels running around everywhere. Quite a show!

Great Horned Owls hunt in late evening, night and early morning. If an active nest is found, one parent will be guarding the owlets, often very sleepy with eyes closed, exhausted from the night’s activities. The young, however, will look at the observer with wide-open eyes, curious about all that is going on.

The Pileated Woodpecker makes a number of nest/sleeping cavities for both parents, and selects one for nesting. It takes a little observation time to find an active nest hole. Once the young are hatched, both parent woodpeckers will usually feed them regurgitated carpenter ants. Since they can store large quantities of ants for regurgitation, they can cover a large territory to find sufficient food for four to five young, but there may be a long wait

for the observer to witness a feeding. Pileated Woodpeckers provide large tree cavities that are used by small owls, like Screech, Flammulated, Northern Pygmy, and Saw-Whet. Nuthatches, chickadees and smaller woodpeckers also benefit from the many large Pileated Woodpecker tree cavities.

So look for holes in tree snags, stay awhile, and you may see a nesting bird fly in or out!

If you missed the Mountain Bird Festival in Ashland this year (held May 30 – June 1), be sure to join in next year on all the excitement of late spring and early summer discoveries of the lives of our feathered friends.

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The **Golden Eagle** uses its agility and speed combined with powerful feet and massive, sharp talons to snatch up its prey.



Young **Great Horned Owls** make loud, persistent hissing or screeching sounds, often confused with those of barn owls.



A **Pileated Woodpecker** pair stays together on its territory all year-round and is a nonmigratory species.

PHOTO CREDIT

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