

BIRD EXPLORER

The elusive Barn Owl

BY PETER J. THIEMANN

The Barn Owl is a species that lives in the Applegate Valley and on every continent except Antarctica. It is mainly a tropical and subtropical bird that has expanded its range northward, often following human land development.

True to its name, we can find this nocturnal owl in our barns, roosting or nesting in roof timbers in daytime. Go to Hanley Farm in Central Point and ask to visit their big barn—you will most likely see one or more Barn Owls.

As an image hunter, I have been frustrated by this species, simply because there is often no light when they are out hunting mice and other rodents. When they are roosting or nesting, it is always dark, and I don't like to use a flash or other disturbing lighting.

But there was an exception one day. While climbing up a mountain cliff to look for a nesting Prairie Falcon, I discovered right next to the falcon's nest a small

cave entrance with a Barn Owl guarding it.

With good light, here was finally my opportunity to capture this elusive night owl with my camera. Not wanting to disturb what appeared to be a nesting owl, and not being able to see into the cave, I had to guess if there was a nest. But then, on another visit, I observed two Barn Owls at the cave entrance—a sure sign of a nesting pair.

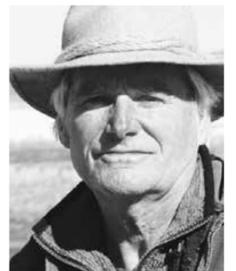
What struck me most was the fairytale quality of my Barn Owl images with lichen-covered rocks and this mysterious dark cave entrance!

In Chapter 13 of my book, *Great Gray Owl in California, Oregon, and Washington* (available on Amazon), there is more about our fascination with owls. We have all heard about the folklore surrounding these mysterious creatures of the night that fly and kill silently. Often the only sound is the death cry of its prey.

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Photos courtesy of Peter J. Thiemann flicker photo stream.



Barn Owl guarding cave entrance.



A pair of nesting Barn Owls.

Wiggle your toes in the river and think lampreys

The Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council is working with local biologists and organizations to help understand lamprey eels and their habitat in the Applegate Watershed. If you have any stories or historical observations about lampreys in the Applegate River and its tributaries, we would love to hear from you. Email us at contact@apwc.info or drop by our office at 6941 Upper Applegate Road in Ruch.

Here is information about lamprey eels from an article in the winter 2017 issue of *The Confluence* (Rogue River Watershed Council newsletter) written by Stewart Reid, PhD, an independent conservation biologist who has been working with lampreys for close to 20 years.

Lampreys begin life as eyelash-sized ammocoetes (larvae), with no eyes or teeth. Ammocoetes burrow in fine sediments, where they are abundant, but rarely seen,

and are filter feeders, living on the suspended microorganisms in the water. They play important roles as water cleaners and bioturbators, or mixers, of bottom sediments. This goes on for five to seven years, with ammocoetes growing close to pencil size. So, when you look at a sandy or silty stream bottom between your toes, think lampreys.

When ready, ammocoetes transform, growing eyes, teeth and a sucker mouth, but they don't start feeding yet. They swim to sea, where young lampreys begin to feed, growing up to two and a half feet. Then they come back, but not necessarily to their birth stream. Instead, they look for any suitable stream, as long as it smells like ammocoetes, which the Rogue River does.



This lets them know that it's a good place to spawn. In fresh water, adults stop feeding, swim upstream, then hide under cover to prepare for spawning. This usually takes almost a year, using up body reserves—females shrink a quarter of their length.

In spring, males and females build shallow nests, or redds, moving and arranging rocks with their mouths. After spawning, adults die, settling on the bottom, contributing rich bodies full of marine nutrients to the rivers in which their young will rear.

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