

NATIVE FLORA & FAUNA WITH SIERRA FOOTHILL CONSERVANCY

The Most Valuable Bird in the Valley

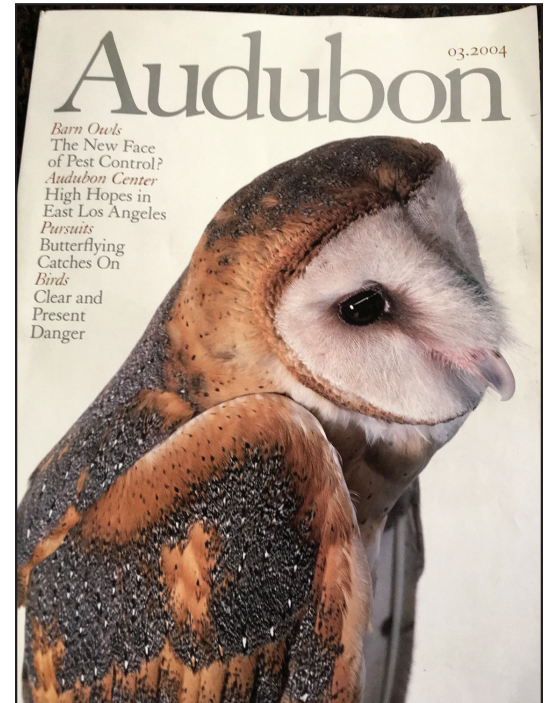
By DENNIS CHRISTIANSEN
Sierra Foothill Conservancy docent

I remember the day in 1991 when I received three little baby barn owls so ugly that only a mother could love. They were about 2 to 3 weeks old. Barn owls (*Tyto alba*) lay their eggs approximately one every 48 hours during the months of March - June. So, if six eggs are laid, they would hatch over a period of almost two weeks. Reason: If times get hard and the parents can't get enough food for everyone, the oldest bird will consume the youngest. Thus, always guaranteeing the furthering of the species—a species that is found on every continent except Antarctica.

I was just getting started in wildlife rehabilitation, so I did my body checks on the little guys and found that one had several bones broken in its shoulder. The bones were protruding out and had already begun to heal together incorrectly. Remember, bird bones are hollow, which enables them to fly, and they heal in about 21 days when broken. I asked: Could I raise the little damaged one to use as an Educational Bird as it would never be able to be released back into the wild? That's how I met Rosie. She was in my classroom for 13 years.

In the wild, approximately 70 percent of the barn owl babies will die within the first year. Life is tough, even though they are terrific hunters and have some of the best hearing in the world. Their ears are nothing more than two holes in the sides of their heads. Their sound-catcher is the entire heart-shaped white disc on the front of their face. Their face is divided in the middle by feathers. Every sound that comes to the right side of their face is directed to the right ear opening. Sound that comes to the left side is directed to the left ear opening. Imagine if our own sound-catchers were the size of our faces. Fat chance on getting a date with ears that size!

Barn owls fly along panning their faces left and right facing the ground. Their head never moves, only their body. If a sound comes up of a gopher pushing dirt out of its hole and is detected by the left ear, immediately the owl



Rosie on the cover of Audubon magazine.

turns its head so that the sound is detected in the right ear, then back to the left, and so on until the sound is heard exactly the same in both ears. It triangulates the sound, flies down, and catches the gopher, never having to see it. Their kill rate is about 80 percent, much higher than most big game animals. A single barn owl with consume a 1,000 rodents in one year.

Barn owls don't build nests. They find a flat spot in a sheltered area, like a barn, a hollow tree, or the flat area on top of a palm tree. Farmers have learned the value of the barn owl and are now installing nesting boxes on their ranches to encourage the barn owls to help with their gopher/rodent problems.

Barn owls don't hoot! They scream or shriek at night while flying with their four-foot wingspan. They make churtily sounds in their nesting area and use hisses or clicks

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Tollhouse resident Billie Ramirez was recently transferred to the Auberry Branch Library. She hopes the library open again soon! CATCHPOLE PHOTO

Billie Ramirez fills open library position after Fleming retires

By THOMAS W. CATCHPOLE
Mountain Press contributing writer

The Auberry Branch Library has a new full-time employee. After Raelene Fleming retired this spring, a position for library assistant became available. Tollhouse resident Billie Ramirez has filled this vacancy at the Auberry Library.

Ramirez is not new to the Auberry Library. "I have worked for Fresno County Public Library as a library assistant for a little more than five years," she remarked. "I started out working part-time at the Shaver Lake branch, with one day a week at Auberry. I was a full-time 'floater,' working at more than half of the county's library branches, and worked at the Clovis branch until May of this year when I was transferred to the Auberry branch." She has worked at the Auberry branch many times over the last five years covering vacations and even

did Storytime in the spring of 2019 when they were without a Children's Librarian.

Ramirez was born in Missouri, moved to Denver as a child and lived there for over 20 years. She has been married for 18 years and has five children: one adult child lives in Kansas, and four are still at home attending Sierra Unified schools. She and her husband moved with their family to Tollhouse in 2011. Ramirez has an associate's degree in Business Administration and is currently working on a bachelor's in Business Administration through the Working Scholars program funded by the California State Library. Her "spare time" hobbies include quilting and gardening.

Over the years, the library system organization has changed. At present there are over 35 library branches in Fresno County that are

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