

# Naturalists and Newspapers

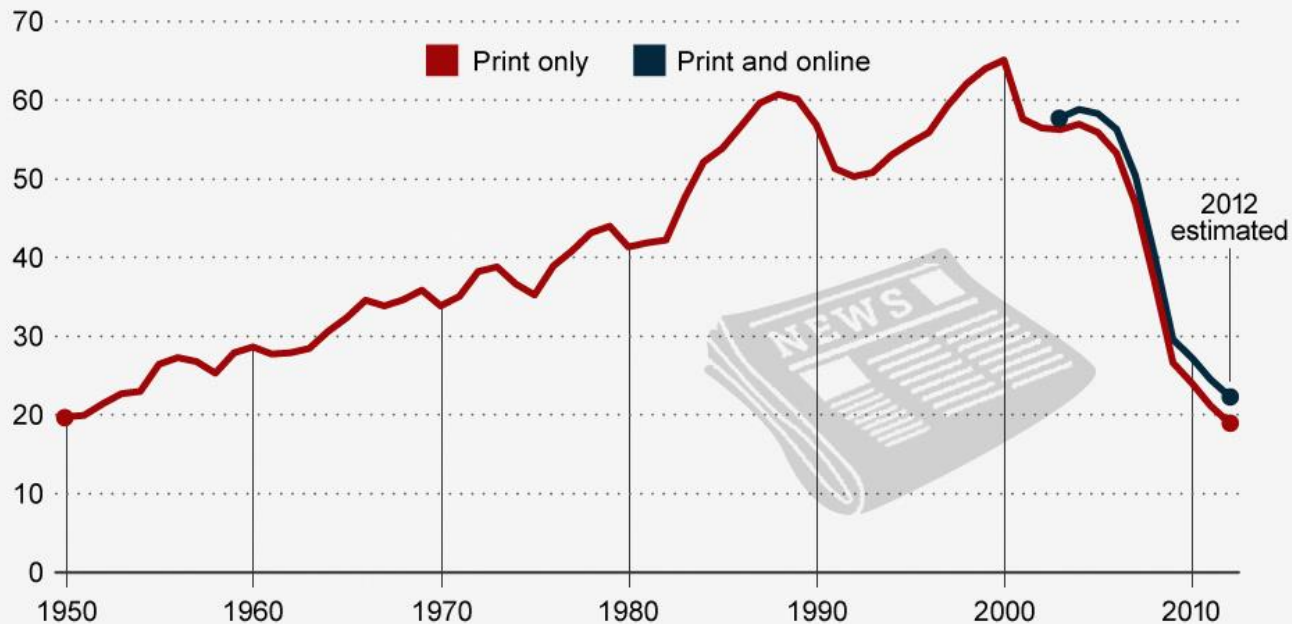
Ellen Cochran  
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California Naturalist Program  
Regional Rendezvous  
Pepperwood October 8, 2017

# Media Apocalypse

## 50 Years of Growth Wiped Out in a Decade

Newspaper advertising revenue in the United States (in billion U.S. dollars; adjusted for inflation)



# The Little Guys Hang In There

- Focus on local news
- No political endorsements
- Eschew editorials

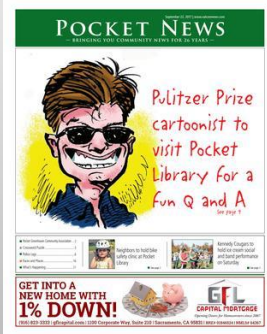
# Case Study

## Valley Community Newspapers

Dailies up and down the Sacramento Valley

Four Sacramento neighborhood newspapers

Senior and kids publications



# Fulfilling the Mission

Promote stewardship of California's natural resources through local publications

Photo Essays

Reports from the Field

Ask a Naturalist

Ask a Scientist

Features

Profiles

Calendars

Columns

Fun Facts

How to

News Story

Book Reviews

Puzzles

Art Work

Quizzes/Contests

Youth Update

Sponsored Pieces

Legislative Updates

# Creating a Column

Valley Community Newspapers

Runs in multiple newspapers

Focus is on urban wildlife

Credentials as naturalist give imprimatur

Use experts to verify facts



# Life on Two Rivers

## Life on Two Rivers

By ELLEN COCHRANE

Some of the great animal mysteries of the world will never be solved, such as how can my dog breathe under the blankets, or why are cats engineered to be heat seeking creatures. While this story may not reveal deep, dark secrets of nature, it will bring you closer to the feathers and furs outside your window in our beautiful, riparian Sacramento neighborhoods. There is so much drama in the yard.

### Raccoons

We got the call in Bodega Bay. "She's okay, but she's been attacked by raccoons." Two hours later an embarrassed dog with a shorn head greeted me at the door. She had scratches and abrasions and a permanent fear of the masked bandit that owns the night.

The miniature poodle had swam in our pool, picked the front and swam through the dog door, but attacking her territory was a bridge too far. My first inclination after the assault was to capture the criminal and relocate it miles



up the American River. Common sense prevailed. We live with hundreds of raccoons in this two-tier city, and most of them live in our river neighborhoods. Relocation is not a solution. (Relocated wildlife usually ends up dying in unfamiliar territory.) Destroying the creature was out of the question.

My neighbors on Nest/Dove regaled me with stories about their hoodlums; they've broken up raccoon barrels with waste hoses, chased them out of basins, the chimneys, garages and the undercarriage of a truck.

If I was going to live with them, I needed to get smart. They certainly are, so I studied up.

In Germany they call them washing bears in French—their word comes from *alpinisme*—roughness, meaning "he scratches with his hand."

I found out that these intelligent mammal mammals have extremely sensitive noses; they can manipulate lichen, bark, bird feathers and deer hair. They don't really wash their food, but will roll and manipulate it on dry land and in water, using sense of touch to gather information. With no opposable thumbs they can't grab and lift, but they can both hands together to explore and grasp. The paw uses a special "whisker" called the vibrissae. These specialized hairs extend slightly beyond

the front claws and transmit information much like the whiskers on cats.

They are a new world animal found almost everywhere in North America, including our cities, under porches and sheds. So resolving human/raccoon conflict can be a challenge.

Raccoons are not a form of wild dog or cat; in fact their closest relatives are ring-tailed coatis (a Central-South American animal). One thing is certain—they are survivors. Transplanted to Asia and Europe as necessities and pets, escaped raccoons now claim large territories on these continents.

Encouraged by acreage from raccoons to use the areas as underground highways and human structures, raccoons are predators like black bears used to keep raccoons in check, but that's not the case now. The



Below left: This raccoon had a hairy animal dad. Above: Raccoon after a hunt up a ladder.



Photo by Ellen Cochran

below left) This raccoon had a hairy animal dad. Above: Raccoon after a hunt up a ladder.

raccoon number one predator is now man.

Early spring days are the time when raccoons are most active. We will also see more raccoons out and about at night during the warmer months because while they don't hibernate, they decrease activity in the winter in a type of dormancy called "daily torpor."

In the wild their food is about 40 percent invertebrates, 33 percent plant foods, and 27 percent vertebrates. That can translate 40 percent cat feces, fruit trees, an entire garbage in the trash can.

After the dog was realized that my owl backyard shed to a brood. We 4 year it down. Pile of fruit also helped, as it leave out any 80 300 food. The po

teer the minute sounds of rodents chewing and scratching.

These owls are adored with a heart-shaped face with no ear tufts and light-colored feathers. They get their name from their love of barns and abandoned buildings for roosting.

The large ear tufts and blaring eyes mark this as a nocturnal animal. It lives the life of a hunter, not a prey.

There is no hoot, and alas, no screech. This small, miniature owl has a rich whirring whiny call with the cadence of a bouncing ball—starting slowly and speeding up toward the end. You'll find it mostly in our river neighborhoods. It lives the life of a hunter, not a prey.

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### Life on Two Rivers: Owling in the City

By ELLEN COCHRANE

Tucked into dense tree canopy or below in a rain forest, the urban owl is almost impossible to find in the day. Your best bet to see them is the magic, crepuscular hour—the faded, blue twilight dusk and dawn. While more commonly encountered in the Sacramento and American Rivers, we do have them in our city.

The Barn, the Western Screech and Great Horned owls.

Owling is a full sensory quest. You can stare on your block by noting white wash (droppings collected under a favorite roost) and listening for distinctive calls. One can go on line to hear the different calls and use the "Eagle Eye" feature of eBird (www.ebird.org) to locate owl sightings in the area. On eBird, people post information on location, photos and even record recordings and you can explore the site and see all the reports without joining. Look around the area and see if you can hear their calls. If you're really lucky you'll find some owl calls—though it remains of undisciplined bones and fur, and don't show. They usually swallow prey whole and then regurgitate the remains.

As birds of the night, owls capture the imagination of many cultures. Witches, healers, medicine, luck, non-powerful attributes were placed upon owls. According to the legend, owls are one of the oldest groups of living birds and have lived with us in our imagination since our beginnings.

Many of us have heard the low, hoarse, raspy night hoot. It's most common during the summer mating season and is meant to attract females or beg for food. In most neighborhoods this is the owl you're most likely to see.

Another owl night hooter does not hoot at all, and the three whirring call must have the heart of nearby cats. It's a prodigious killer, able to hunt in the dark night with precision using hearing that can detect

the minute sounds of rodents chewing and scratching. These owls are adored with a heart-shaped face with no ear tufts and light-colored feathers. They get their name from their love of barns and abandoned buildings for roosting.

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### Worms in the City

By ELLEN COCHRANE

Owl eyes are specially adapted for hunting low light. They are often very large, taking up to 30 percent of the skull volume (compared to about 1% for humans). The eyes are long tubes attached to the skull and they don't move in the sockets.

This gives the owl its deep gaze, along with up to 140 degrees of head rotation, has led to many myths of supernatural power and intelligence. However, in the scope of bird intelligence owls are not high on the list, but their senses make up for less brainspower.

Their main superpower, however, is their hearing. With asymmetric placement of the ears, a facial disc of feathers to funnel sound to those ears, and extreme acuity, some owls can locate and distinguish their Nocturnal Dancers. Specially adapted flight feathers allow nearly silent flight, which prevents alerting their prey as well as helping them hear the faintest noises from their prey.

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East Sacramento Canon restaurant due to open in July

CKM grad wins East Sacramento Preservation Scholarship

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