

Inside Tucson Business - Column

## **To save the pygmy owl in Arizona, let's domesticate and eat 'em**

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Just when I was enjoying the sudden freedom from ferruginous pygmy owls (hereinafter The Owl), those professional pests at the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife (hereinafter The Pests) are asking for The Owl to be relisted as endangered.

It had been so listed between 1997 and 2006. It was delisted because the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service determined that there is an abundance of The Owl just over the hill south of here in Mexico and they are only scarce here because this is the uppermost limit of their range.

But that was not good enough for The Pests. They assert that the owls that flew around here were not identical to those which are plentiful in Mexico, but are a separate sub-species that must be preserved at all costs.

A biologist for one of The Pests asserts it is difficult to determine the number of owls here because they keep flying around and won't hold still for an owl census. This despite the fact that owls are easily contained because they are not high-flying birds and unlike many of their human brothers, can be intimidated by the appearance of a border fence.

This got me to thinking. Why is there an alarming dearth of The Owl around here? There is no alarming shortage of sheep, goats, cattle, or even chickens. Chickens! Yes, that's the answer. These animals are not endangered for the simple reason that they are domesticated. Unlike wild animals, they have to stay where they are put. They are raised so that we have plenty of them. They are owned by people who have an incentive to have them thrive.

Presently, the appearance of The Owl on a person's property signals a rapid depreciation in the value of that property as it then becomes owl habitat and must be dedicated to The Owl. The answer is obvious. The Owl must be domesticated and raised like chickens. There is no shortage of chickens. And

if a chicken crosses the road to get to your property, you are at liberty to introduce it to the wonders of the fricassee.

When The Owl is domesticated and raised for profit, we will be chock-a-block in owls around here. They will start appearing on menus throughout the Sonoran region as a low fat, high protein, exceptionally tender alternative to chicken. Chick-Fil-A, the colonel, and all the fast food outlets will be substituting owl meat for chicken. The sub-species will have been saved. Owl farmers will prosper by selling their eggs and even feathers.

Yes, The Owl could have a bright future if The Pests would get behind this push to domesticate it. I can almost taste the deep fried owl now. What a treat!

Surely there would be no need to relist The Owl if it were domesticated. That would save the Fish & Wildlife people a ton of money since they would not have to deal with the then-plentiful birds. The Pests could turn their attentions to wildlife that is actually in short supply and which the world cannot live without, like the gray wolf.

The wolf is a good case in point. They reintroduced it into what they said was its former range. Humans had, in the meantime, taken up positions on land they called theirs, and resented the heck out of the wolves who were impertinent (and hungry) enough to raid the stockpiles of livestock for human food. The humans had the same designs on the livestock, but they wanted it for themselves and were reluctant to share it with the wolf.

These conflicts are unnecessary. Just allow The Owl to be freely taken and create a market for this new, exotic, and formerly endangered food source.

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