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Scout installs barn owl nesting boxes to earn Scouting's Hornaday Award

Submitted by Tyler Higgins



From left: Justin and Sam Higgins, with EBMUD Ranger Gerald Sylvester Photo provided

Last October, Sam Higgins led Scouts from Lafayette's Troop 219 to install five nesting boxes for barn owls at the Lafayette Reservoir.

Similar to his older brother Justin's wood duck nesting box service project at the Lafayette Reservoir in 2012, Higgins' service project not only satisfied his service hour requirements for his Eagle rank, but also offered him a chance to earn the coveted Hornaday Award - Scouting's highest conservation award. In order to satisfy the Hornaday Badge requirements, Higgins selected a project category focused on fish and wildlife management that would help barn owls flourish at the Lafayette Reservoir.

The Lafayette Reservoir is a terrific recreational element of our community, attracting thousands of people annually. Unfortunately, many visitors leave food and trash behind, consequently increasing the rodent population. Helping barn owls flourish in the community is a natural way to reduce rodents, keeping wildlife balanced at the reservoir.

"Barn owls are a very beautiful raptor, and as someone who loves all birds and wants to help conserve habitat for them to thrive, I wanted to make sure that barn owls would have a secure place to hatch their young at the Lafayette Reservoir," said Higgins.

In conjunction with Scouting's Mt. Diablo Silverado Council's Hornaday advisor, Lillian Remer, Higgins worked with East Bay Municipal Utility District Ranger and Wildlife Biologist Gerald Sylvester to select sites for the barn owl nesting boxes around the Lafayette Reservoir.

"My nesting box project was focused on helping increase the barn owl population as they are the resident owl species that do the most to keep rodent populations in check," added Higgins.

Visitors looking to locate the barn owl nesting boxes will see them in various locations surrounding the Lafayette Reservoir - both in lower elevations around picnic areas as well as upper elevations along the Rim Trail. Onlookers should be sure to keep their distance from the nesting boxes and not disturb the areas.

"At a young age, my family taught me about the importance of wildlife management. I am proud of my service project, give thanks to the Scouts that helped me, and hope that it raises awareness of the barn owl's important role in the ecosystem at the Lafayette Reservoir," added Higgins.

"The William T. Hornaday Award is rarely earned because it requires a significant contribution to one or more areas of conservation. The Mt. Diablo Silverado Council serves over 10,000 youth each year, and yet Sam Higgins is one of only a few Scouts in our Council to apply for the Hornaday Badge in the last several years. Sam did an excellent job of learning about the important role barn owls play in the ecosystem, and building nesting boxes for them to flourish is a natural way to help curb the rodent population at the Lafayette Reservoir," said Lillian Remer, the outdoor ethics advocate of the Mt. Diablo Silverado Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

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