

RIVER RAISIN RAPTOR CENTER

A newsletter with some interesting doings in the world of raptor rehabilitation
February 2006

By Dody Wyman

This has been a wonderful year for River Raisin Raptor Center! Our first silent auction, a couple of new species coming into rehabilitation, and the promise of a bright new future for our educational programs are among the highlights.

Silent Auction

The Raptor Center held its first silent auction in October. Our talented volunteers worked very hard to plan and implement this event which they named "Dessert and Champagne with the Owls". Our four educational owls were on hand to charm all the attendees. Volunteers enjoyed showing everyone the owls and answering questions about the individual birds and their species.

The desserts, made mostly by the volunteers, were delicious. The auction items varied all over the



Owl cake made by Kelly Krawcke

map. Among the unique items auctioned off were a tandem skydive jump, a massage, many original pieces of artwork, jewelry, and salsa dancing lessons. Over 150 people enjoyed the evening and made our efforts profitable.

The Summer of Turkey Vultures

Many of you are familiar with our resident Grand Dame Turkey Vulture, Lily. Additionally, most of you read about Guzzy, a young vulture who came

to us late in 2004 and joined Lily as a second ambassador Turkey Vulture. In May of this year, we got a call from a rehabilitator near Kalamazoo who had received a nestling Turkey Vulture that had been taken from its nest by young boys. The nestling was brought to us that day to be put in with Lily who hopefully would act as a surrogate mother. Since we wanted the baby and Lily to form a bond, we moved Guzzy out to our large 140-foot flight enclosure.

Lily did a magnificent job of raising "baby"... she pecked at him appropriately, made it clear that Turkey Vulture society had a definite hierarchy, and provided a good role model.

While the baby was learning about Turkey Vulture etiquette, Guzzy was practicing flying. He totally amazed us as he flew back and forth over the 140 feet. His original injuries included two broken wings, so it came as a complete surprise to see him fly so gracefully! He was showing us he was releasable!



Two young Turkey Vultures ready for release

Mid-summer we received a second young vulture. Knowing we would have three vultures to release, we put the two youngsters in the large flight enclosure with Guzzy, hoping they would form a small family group.

Release day came September 3. All three flew nearby for several days, and then Guzzly and the newest youngster took off for parts unknown. The other baby (raised by Lily) came "home" every few days for a handout... the highlight was watching a group of five vultures thermaling high overhead, and having one ("our" baby) break formation and come down for a snack.... It was gratifying to know that she had found wild friends to hang out with! By the middle of October, she was gone – hopefully headed south with her wild friends and safe.

Eagles

We had two Bald Eagles spend time with us this year. The first one recovered from a broken wing and was successfully released mid-summer. The second Eagle was transferred to us from another rehabilitator after undergoing surgery to repair a severe wing fracture. She was put into our large flight enclosure to see if she could fly well enough to be released. After a month of practice and exercise, it was obvious that she couldn't fly well enough to make it in the wild. After a few phone calls and emails, we found her a new permanent home at the Columbus Zoo in Ohio. There she joins another non-releasable Bald Eagle in a wonderfully eagle-friendly enclosure.

Our Past and Future

River Raisin Raptor Center will be going through some very exciting and positive changes in the next several months. I'd like to take this opportunity to share a bit of the history of the organization so everyone will understand how bright our future is.

Our Past

My passion for wildlife rehabilitation began in the mid-1980's in Ann Arbor when I met Pat DeLong and Carol Akerlof, each of whom headed a loosely organized group that rehabilitated mammals and birds respectively. I eagerly joined their folds – anxious to learn anything I could about wildlife rehabilitation. Having flown gliders for several years, I had also become very interested in the large soaring raptors with whom I shared the skies. By 1990, I was privileged to be able to begin working with raptors in rehabilitation. My early mentors, in addition to Pat and Carol, were Karen Young and Sherri Smith, who willingly shared their

knowledge. By that time, local wildlife rehabilitation had been organized into the mammal group, Friends of Wildlife, led by Pat DeLong, and Bird Rescue which was primarily a songbird rehabilitation group. My husband, Jack, built flight enclosures to accommodate our large raptor patients. I began attending national wildlife rehabilitation conferences and networking farther and wider. The passion I felt for these predatory birds continued to grow.

I had a desire to share this passion and, through non-releasable ambassador birds, to educate about the environment, habitat, and conservation. One requirement to obtain state and federal permits to keep non-releasable educational birds is to be a 501 (c) (3) non-profit. And so, in 1999, River Raisin Raptor Center was formed. The organization from that point on had two main purposes – our continuing rehabilitation efforts and a brand new educational program.

I have had a wonderful time building River Raisin Raptor Center from a passion to a successful non-profit. So many people have helped in so many ways. It truly has been a team effort. Our dedicated volunteers have put so much into keeping the birds healthy, the enclosures clean, the website working, fundraising successful, and continually encouraging our mission. We could not have done this without our loyal donors who have given so generously "to the birds". When we first became a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization in 1999, I had no idea how successful we would become. The Raptor Center has grown from a tiny, one-person, home-based operation to a multi-person, but still home-based organization. Our first year as an educational organization, we did 12 outreach programs with three species of raptors. In 2005 we did 82 outreach programs with seven species. We declined another 25 or so due to lack of time and resources. Over the last few years, River Raisin Raptor Center began consuming my life. Passion or not, I had a choice to make. Continue to be totally consumed or leave a legacy for the next generation to continue. My clear choice was to leave a legacy.

But how to accomplish this..... With board members and volunteers, we began plotting and planning over two years ago. Our hope was to build a full raptor education center which would be open to the public, teach youngsters of all ages about the environment through our ambassador birds, and continue the rehabilitation part of the organization. To accomplish this would require not only land but some really "big" money... followed by continually increasing fundraising efforts to

maintain it. None of us had experience in this kind of major undertaking. We had a fun time plotting, planning, and talking to some really wonderful people willing to help. Contacts led to more contacts and our circle widened. But after two years of trying, we were still lacking our “big” money.

More than two years ago, when we first started looking for a home to build a new raptor center, I approached the Leslie Science Center in Ann Arbor. LSC was formed in 1983 as an environmental education center which reaches more than 17,000 people a year. It sits on 20 acres that Dr. Eugene Leslie and his wife Emily willed to the City of Ann Arbor to be used as a park. When we first talked, more than two years ago, LSC was not ready to commit fully to what was rapidly becoming a growing and very popular educational outreach effort.

Our Future

By the fall of 2005, I realized that the dream of a full raptor center probably wasn't going to become a reality. About the same time, Leslie Science Center suggested we again talk about the educational partnering. One of our volunteers, Francie Krawcke, is on staff there. Francie came to us in 2003 with more than ten years experience in Minnesota and South Carolina working with raptors and presenting raptor education programs. We both very quickly realized that this could be a near-perfect partnership for the educational part of the Raptor Center. Having had more than two years to think and plan, they were ready to house all of our present ambassador birds. The LSC staff is excited about expanding the educational programs – both on-site and off-site. In addition to the formal programs they will present, LSC is open to the public. This means many more people will have an opportunity to see these wonderful birds and learn about their important place in the environment.

For me, it means that “my” birds will be close by and that “my” birds can come home for some R & R periodically (I know having the birds come home is mostly R & R for me...:)) It also means the legacy I wanted to leave will prosper. To say I am excited about this is an understatement. Please plan to visit our ambassador birds at Leslie Science Center this spring or summer. Or plan an earlier visit to see the new enclosures being built. Each enclosure will be built to maximize bird

comfort while still affording the public good viewing.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation of raptors is where we started, and nothing will change in this part of our organization at this time. I have been extremely fortunate to have Melissa Salenbien as my “rehab right hand” for the last five years. Even as her life has been changing and taking new directions, she's been available to help when needed. We have also been very fortunate to attract new volunteers who are working toward acquiring their own wildlife rehabilitation permits. Their help and desire to gain more experience has lightened my load tremendously.

I am particularly thrilled to have Joe Sayer and Francine Jones as “transport and triage” volunteers. Both of them have reasonably flexible schedules which allow them to pick up injured birds. Both have experience and training to do the initial triage and get a bird stabilized before bringing it here for further assessment and treatment.

I may have been long-winded, but wanted to explain what your donations, both monetary and otherwise, have helped us build and to thank you all again for your continued support!

Networking

Have you ever wondered what happens when people find songbirds in need of rehabilitation? The Bird Center in Ann Arbor is a non-profit organization led by Carol Akerlof devoted to the rehabilitation and release of songbirds. They are desperately looking for a home for this coming year. Minimum requirements are 700 – 1,000 square feet, water and electricity. If you know of any space available, please call them at (734) 761-9640.

Kid's Stuff!

Our website has a guest writer who has put together a new fun page for young budding raptor enthusiasts. Sarah Toner, one of our younger supporters, has a keen interest in raptors and has kindly put together this page especially for kids. Thank you Sarah!

2005 Donors who helped make our year a successful one.

Norman & Jean Bach
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James & Mary Ann Wilkes
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Your tax deductible contributions are warmly welcomed and will help us continue to help raptors in need. You can now make donations online through PayPal on our website! Thank you Erin Curtis for making this possible!

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We are a tax-deductible 501 (c) (3) non-profit and all donations go “to the birds!”