

# RIVER RAISIN RAPTOR CENTER

A newsletter with some of the interesting doings in the world of raptor rehabilitation  
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## By Dody Wyman

This newsletter is way, way overdue. All summer I've been thinking about all the great and wonderful and exciting things that have been happening here and formulating ideas for this newsletter.

And then September 11 came. There is no doubt this day will impact our lives for a very long time. My very sincere condolences and thoughts for those of you who lost family or friends in NYC or Washington.

Since that day, as I work with the birds and as I spend time with them and interact with them I realize how big the gulf really is between our world and theirs. They have no idea what happened on the east coast. They have no thoughts of knives, guns, bombs, bacteria warfare, pesticides, or nuclear weapons. Sometimes we might think they live a simple life. Maybe it is, maybe not. But to really study how the rest of the natural world interacts is quite a marvel. They don't go to war, they don't look for revenge, they don't plot terrorist attacks. They just live. And somehow they are still managing to live in "our" world. A world that isn't always willingly shared with "nature" or "wildlife". A world that all too often refers to wildlife as something that needs to be "managed".

All of that said, I still do live in "our" world, and feel a great need to help those creatures that try to coexist with us. Perhaps we could all learn a lot from them if we'd only take the time to listen.

## Feeder Folk

The last six months have been a wonderful experience organizing my "Feeder Folk" brigade. This is a truly dedicated bunch of people who love raptors and want to help by giving their time. As many of you know, my husband, Jack, is an avid sailplane pilot. We travel quite a bit in pursuit of those updrafts - thermals, wave, ridge lift. Whatever it takes to keep a sailplane aloft for hours on end keeps a sailplane pilot's adrenaline

going. (Jack soars in his sailplane and I work to help the birds soar again.)



Feeder Folk - Melissa, Sue-Ellen, Gina

Our "Feeder Folk" have made our trips not only possible, but worry-free. Each volunteer has undergone specialized training. They have learned about each and every bird that resides here, including the different personalities and idiosyncrasies. They have learned how and what to feed each bird, what to look for to make sure each bird is healthy, and how to properly clean the cages. They have formed teams, and communicate among themselves day to day to ensure that each and every bird is healthy, happy, and well cared for. And then they leave phone messages for me assuring me from afar that everything is not only under control, but in great shape. I owe all of these folks a huge debt for making it possible for me to have some raptor-free, worry-free time off to enjoy crewing for Jack and his sailplane. My very special feeder folk are Sue-Ellen Smith (and friends), Gina Steele, Laura Pavledes, Melissa Salenbien, Pat Sanders, Janet Cowling, and Tammy Stacy. And a very special thanks to my two sub-permittees who are there to take care of any problems, Cynthia Avery and Kathy Judge.

## Houdini and Bess

Many of you know Houdini and Bess, the two non-releasable screech owls that have been with me for many years. Houdini passed on in September from old age. He died quietly in his nest box, where I found him. He certainly did his

part to teach people about screech owls and conservation during the last years of his life. He and Bess also did a wonderful job of being foster birds to many, many orphaned babies.

Bess has had some very special opportunities during the last couple years. Every few months, she and I visit the Hospice Residence of Ann Arbor where Bess brings delight to many of their residents. Most people have never seen an owl up close, and cherish the opportunity to do so. Many thanks to Stephanie Hunter, the Hospice "Bird Lady" for coordinating this. It is heart-warming to be able to bring a moment of pleasure to these special folks.

### **Screech Owl Babies go to NYC**

Each year we receive a handful of orphaned screech owls. Since Bess and Houdini have done a wonderful job of being foster parents, we get young from other rehabbers. This last spring, we responded to a call from New York City looking for orphaned young screech owls to be part of a reintroduction program in both Central Park and the Bronx Zoo grounds. And what a program this promises to be. Coordinated by an Avian Conservationist, Dr. William Giuliano, at Fordham University, the intent is a two year program of releasing 15 - 20 young each year. They have been unsuccessful in determining why there no longer are screech owls in these two parks, but have done studies that show the prey base is good and there is no reason there shouldn't be sustainable screech owl populations once again in those areas. Because screech owls do not migrate, and Central Park is isolated from other wooded areas, reintroduction is the only way to get a viable population back on track.



Jack & Dody Wyman, Bess, Pilot Vince Colling

After the horrors of September 11, Northwest was not flying any live animals, so we were extremely lucky to find pilot Vince Colling, who very graciously flew the owls from Ann Arbor to New York in time for their scheduled release the week of September 24.

This will be the first time that I will learn the outcome of released birds. (Most released birds never call or write...) These young owls were banded and then fitted with tiny harnesses carrying transmitters prior to release so they can be tracked individually for the next year. With the mortality rate of all raptors at an average of about 80% the first year, we are obviously realistic, but also very hopeful that some of "our" babies will live long lives and begin many new generations of screech owls in NYC.

### **IWRC Conference**

I'll be off to the International Wildlife Rehabilitator's Council (IWRC)'s annual conference in mid-November which will be held in Orlando, Florida. This will be my first time presenting a paper at a national conference - I'll be giving one paper on raptor rehab "tips", and also leading a discussion group on the role of the "backyarder" or small rehabber who makes up the vast bulk of wildlife rehabbers. This promises to be a really worthwhile conference. By mid-September, there were thirty plus people from other countries registered to attend! Add that to the anticipated few hundred from the United States and we hope to have a really great conference with a lot of learning, sharing, and networking.

### **Flight Cage (the "big" one)**

Yes, it's actually happening! We're way behind schedule, but the big flight cage is becoming a reality. The walls are going up, and it's beginning to look very impressive! We've had many, many offers of help, which is appreciated. Jack has worn many hats in this project from architect to construction manager and is the main reason the cage is going to be so perfect.



Ralph Krug, Deb & Klaus Wolter, Jack Wyman

## Special Birds

All birds that come through my door are special. But I recently received an especially special one since it was brought to me by my daughter, Debbie! She had just finished a walk with a neighbor. Upon arriving back home, she found her neighbor's husband waiting for her. He'd found a great-horned owl by the road and figured Debbie would know exactly what to do. And she did. With gloves in hand, she knew she had to grab something to put the owl in. A plastic garbage can seemed the only quick choice. She and her neighbor went to the site and picked up the owl. She brought it to me (and was then roped into spending the rest of the day working on the big flight cage). The owl is in very bad shape, and prognosis isn't good, but at this point he at least has a warm, dark, quiet place to try to heal himself.

## Mouse/Rat Poison

There is a good possibility that the owl had eaten Decon or another mouse/rat poison and was compromised to the point that she was unable to hunt and was near the road eating road kill. I'd like to make sure everyone knows how DeCon works. It is made to taste good to mice and rats. They eat it, and it slowly kills them. It takes up to several days before they die. During this time, since it tastes so good, they continue to chow down on the poison. They slowly bleed to death. As they are dying, they are watched by predators who look on them as an easy meal. By the time they are eaten by a predator, they are truly loaded with rodenticides. Depending on how

"loaded" they are, it might only take one mouse or rat to cause irreversible damage to an owl, hawk, fox, coyote, cat, dog, or any other predator.

The very best alternative to rodenticides is to cultivate habitat that will encourage the natural predators. This is a long term solution that won't provide a quick fix. Another faster alternative is the snap traps that kill instantly. I know this isn't appealing to a lot of people but it is environmentally friendly. Live trapping is fine too, although you are only re-locating the problem and the rodent might return quickly. No matter what method you use, be sure you don't have open seeds or other food items that attract rodents. Otherwise, be patient and be willing to share space with some of these critters.

## A Perfect Release

I want to share the perfect release story with you all. About three weeks ago, I was brought a very large, mature female red-tailed hawk that had been hit by a car. She was quite down and out and bleeding from the nose and mouth. She responded beautifully to rehab and quickly recovered. In no time she was fat, aggressive, fit and ready to go back to the wild. We released her October 2<sup>nd</sup> on her old territory. She flew up into a tree, looked around for a few seconds, and immediately took off across the big field. On the other side of the field, a male red-tailed began to soar. It was so obviously her mate welcoming her home. This is what makes all the efforts so worthwhile.

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**100% of your tax deductible donations go "to the birds" and is tremendously appreciated. We are always chasing that "bottom line" which threatens to turn red on a very regular basis!**

**Please make checks payable to:**

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**A very big thanks to everyone for such wonderful continued support!**