

RIVER RAISIN RAPTOR CENTER

A newsletter with some interesting doings in the world of raptor rehabilitation
March 2003

By Dody Wyman

Thank You

I want to extend a very sincere thank you to everyone for helping to make 2002 such a successful year for us. Our organization grew in many ways. More birds needed our help, we shared our educational program birds with a larger number of audiences, and we added many more donors and friends to our list of supporters.

Our financial statements for the year ended 12/31/2002 are attached. As you can see, we ended the year nicely in the black. We decided to set up a new fund called our "Future Fund" into which we plan to put ten percent of our contributions each year. We aren't ready to think of this as an endowment. This will be money that we hope to save for special needs or for future expansion.

2002 Rehab

Rehabbing the birds turned into quite a challenge during the last half of 2002. The third week in August will be remembered as the week West Nile Virus hit, and hit hard. We suddenly got many more calls than normal, mostly about hawks and owls that were on the ground and very sick. Almost every call sounded the same: a hawk or owl that looked fine, but was on the ground unable to fly or only a little, and appearing very tame. Anytime you can get anywhere near a raptor, something is very wrong with that bird.

West Nile virus is spread by certain species of biting mosquitoes. It certainly did cause illness in some humans, but seemed to be hitting birds and horses the hardest, although there were scattered reports of it also being found in squirrels and other mammals. By the time freezing weather brought an end to mosquito season, and hence an end to the calls, we had seen 30 probable cases. There was very little we could do other than offer supportive care for the affected birds. Many seized and died. Many had to be euthanized. We were able to release six after fairly lengthy stays.

Many thanks to Melissa Salenbien and Gina Steele who were such a huge help with the West Nile Virus birds. Each sick bird needed to be tube-fed four to five times a day, as well as kept warm and comfortable in their clean hospital cages.

Our total rehab count for the year was 67 birds from 13 different species. In addition to the raptors we had a Great Blue Heron, a Gull, a Loon, a Mourning Dove, and a Hummingbird that needed help. Our "firsts" included the Great Blue Heron, the Loon, and a Snowy Owl.

2002 Educational Presentations

We were invited to do over 50 presentations this last year - reaching approximately 3,300 people of all ages. Most of the groups were elementary school children. I continue to be thrilled every time a youngster's face lights up when they see an owl for the first time.

Our star owl, "Shadow" the Great Horned, is an old hand at playing audiences and comes out of his travel box erect, with feather tufts standing straight up, eyes glaring, and



looking magnificent. He has become the hit of many preschools and the Hospice Residence in Ann Arbor, where he gives many residents a few minutes of pure joy as they forget why they are there.

New Educational Owl

Meet Stratford the Barred Owl. These owls, cousins to the northwest's Spotted Owl, are less common around Michigan than the Great Horned Owl and inhabit larger forest tracts. They have a very distinctive hoot that is said to sound like "Who cooks for you... Who cooks for you all". They are the only native owl with large brown eyes, which give them a very human-like appearance.



Stratford was hit by a truck near Clayton, Michigan and found by a very caring young man whose family made the effort to find help for the bird. She was in very bad shape and I really didn't

expect her to live. She proved to have a lot of spunk. After several days of sitting with both eyes swollen shut and continued bleeding from her nose and beak, she began to slowly raise her head and open her eyes. We weren't sure how badly her eyes were damaged, or if she would ever be able to see anything. She has made an amazing recovery and although totally blind in one eye and less than perfect sight in the other, she gets around her cage with no problem now. A veterinarian ophthalmologist examined her eyes and said they were both stable and not painful. We are amending our permits to allow us to keep her. I think she'll be a wonderful addition to our programs.

Threatened Species Returns to the Wild

Short-eared Owls are listed as a threatened species in Michigan, which means there just aren't many of them in this state. These medium-sized owls are strikingly beautiful with very delicate colors. These birds hunt



low over large open fields mostly at dusk and dawn. When sightings of them are reported, birders come from quite a distance to see them.

We recently had one brought into rehab with a very bad open fracture of one wing. Dr. Valerie Pratt of Animal Kingdom Veterinary Hospital did a magnificent job of pinning the wing. This bird spent about five weeks in our clinic while the bone healed. It was a nasty break and we didn't know if it would heal in good alignment. After removing the pin, the bird progressed from very small caging to the big flight cage and has amazed us with his recovery. Watching him fly, it was impossible to tell which wing had been broken. He was released the beginning of March back where he was found. A small group of us watched as he flew strongly from tree to tree, apparently glad to be home again.

Rehab Out of State

As some of you know, I am on the board of directors of the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council. We recently had a board meeting in Florida and had an opportunity to see a couple of very different species in rehab. An injured pygmy sperm whale was undergoing rehabilitation nearby and was being cared for in a salt-water pool. We also had a tour of a large facility devoted mostly to rehabilitating pelicans. It is always interesting to learn about the huge diversity of wildlife that needs help.

A Special Bird

So many of the birds we see are special, but now and then we get extra special ones. On January 4, one of the veterinarians we work with, Dr. Kim Barnes, called to say she had just received a Red-tailed Hawk. This bird was brought to her in a garbage bag, presumed dead by the finders when they spotted him along side a road. When Dr. Barnes looked in the bag, she realized the bird was still alive, but barely. Instead of euthanizing him, she called to see if I wanted to give him a chance. Of course I did. This little male was badly injured around his left eye and was very down and depressed.

After a fairly lengthy recovery, it was apparent he wasn't going to be releasable. He had an extraordinarily calm temperament and seemed to really enjoy being with people. We put jesses on him and Melissa took him home with her. While she worked



to make him comfortable in as many different situations as possible, I worked to find him a new home as an educational bird. Marlys Bulander, our Fish & Wildlife permit officer, found him the perfect home with Aimee Pico whose educational facility is near Cleveland, Ohio. Here is a picture of Aimee and the bird she's named "Charlie" behind the Bob Evans in Toledo where we made the transfer. What a bird!

Want List

Our more expensive wants are:

- One or two good used microscopes
- An ophthalmoscope
- A good used lap-top computer
- A Power Point Projector
- A power washer

Our smaller wants:

- Used garden hoses
- Used bath towels
- Baby receiving blankets
- Fleece material
- \$.37 stamps

Volunteers

In addition to the material things listed, we are looking for a few volunteers who don't mind getting dirty and would enjoy cleaning cages. Keeping the birds and cages clean is about 95% of rehabilitation. In exchange for this unglamorous job, you would have the opportunity to observe and get to know the birds. This is an adult-only volunteer position, although I would consider having older children come with a parent. If you think this might be interesting to you, please call or email me.

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