



The Falcon

Our Mission:

To rehabilitate and release injured and orphaned raptors while inspiring environmental understanding through education for the benefit of all living things.

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Bald Eagle Removed from Endangered Species List

By Michael S. Book, Chairman, Board of Directors

On June 28, 2007, the US Fish and Wildlife service removed the Bald Eagle (adopted as our national symbol by the Continental Congress in 1782) from the endangered and threatened species list. In 1995 its status was downgraded from "endangered" to "threatened." This most recent action will become officially effective 30 days after publication in the Federal Register.

When the Endangered Species Act went into effect in 1973 the bald eagle had already been declared an endangered species south of the 40th parallel (about where the Mason Dixon line runs between West Virginia and Pennsylvania) in 1967 under a law that preceded the Endangered Species Act of 1973. It was estimated that the entire population had decreased from over 70,000 birds to about 3,000 birds by 1973. Currently, the population estimate for the species is approximately 9,789 breeding pairs. That number possibly represents 50% of the total population which has now rebounded to nearly 40,000 birds—a remarkable comeback considering the species was on the brink of extinction in all but five northern and northwestern states.

(Continued on Page 2)

Introducing...

"Rusty"!

Earlier this spring, the WVRRC decided to keep a permanently-injured red-phase Eastern Screech-owl to use in educational programs. The owl's name—"Rusty"—is the result of a contest held at Kids' Day in Morgantown. Look for Rusty and loft-mate Otus at educational programs and events this fall! And, look for a photo of him in the next issue of *The Falcon* — he's molting right now, so we thought we'd wait to take his debut picture until he was a bit more handsome!



Annie the Red-tailed Hawk

See page 5 for a list of upcoming events!

(Continued from Page 1)

Here in West Virginia we had only one nesting pair of birds in 1992. In 2007, there are 18 active nests. The Migratory Bird Act of 1918 and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 will continue to provide protection for this magnificent raptor.

Its scientific name is *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*; a sea (halo) eagle (aetus) with a white (leukos) head. The word “bald” also means “white.” It is the only eagle unique to North America. Noted for its keen eyesight, the bald eagle feeds mostly on fish. The females, weighing up to 14 pounds, 35-40 inches long with up to 90 inch wingspans, are 15-20% larger than the males. While unhurried level flight may not exceed 40-45 miles per hour, they can fly to altitudes of over 10,000 feet and dive at speeds exceeding 100 miles per hour.

If all goes well, a bald eagle pair may mate for life, although there is little hard evidence to verify this belief. The female will lay 1-3 eggs that will be incubated for 35 days. It will then take 10-13 weeks to fledge and about another month for final weaning/honing of hunting skills. Depending on food supplies, these mating pairs will require from 18,000 to 180,000 acres to call their home range.



Thunder and Mike at a recent educational program

We have had a bald eagle, Thunder, here at the Center for 14 years now. While Thunder is just one bird, there are a few things about her that seem to differ from other published information. According to most published information, bald eagles mature at 4-5 years—Thunder, however, got her white head and tail feathers at age 6 but wasn't sexually mature until age 8. They have about 7,000 feathers which they molt, according to published findings, in patches over several months starting from the head and working toward the rear of the bird. Thunder's molt begins in May and ends in early to mid December. Her head feathers do not molt until late November and December. By early June she has lost half of her tail feathers. While Thunder is just one bird, our observations of her have been consistent for the past 14 years. There remains a lot to learn and now, with them returning in large numbers, perhaps we will finally get to know and understand this magnificent bird.

NOT ALWAYS UP TO PAR

By Michael S. Book, Chairman, Board of Directors

On the ninth of June a friend and I were playing golf at a nice little course near Elizabeth, Pennsylvania. It's located southeast of Pittsburgh near the Monongahela River. It was a nice day with lots of bird and squirrel activity in all directions. As a rule, golf courses add a lot of green diversity to urban residential areas. This usually equates to lots of living creatures scurrying and flying around plus the audio bonus of the sounds associated with each of them. I enjoy the sounds, even though at times the symphony can become a bit cluttered. Nonetheless, I managed to sort the sounds without looking when my visual sense is busy elsewhere. The Eastern bluebird is just one of the common residents to such habitats; not only is it a wonderful sight to see but its beautiful song goes well with its striking plumage. They seem to calm the chaos and rise above all the other sounds.

On the fifth hole the green was elevated so care had to be taken not to over shoot the target unless you were keen on a return shot up a steep grade. This area had mature Norway spruce planted here and there as additional punishment for those who miss the target. As I was preparing for my approach from about 120 yards out, I began hearing the whining of recently fledged red-tailed hawks. This is common from the time they leave the nest until they are totally on their own. (It's sort of like a young child crying when he's hungry.)

After my shot, which stayed on the green, I began searching the trees behind the green for these noisy youngsters. I still couldn't see them but could tell there were at least two somewhere in the trees. Their plaintive cries continued until we were actually finished with the hole. Something seemed wrong—too much whining from the young ones—so I went down the hill and found a third juvenile laying at the base of one of the spruce trees. I didn't have my protective gloves with me and I am keenly aware (from personal experience) of the dangers of the talons of even an injured bird. But it didn't take long to determine that this raptor was in serious condition. I carefully secured its wings and its talons and began examining it. It was barely alive and suffering from a small caliber gunshot wound to the abdomen. This one couldn't be helped but we called the club house to inform them of the incident. I left the bird there.

About 30 minutes later we came by the same hole but from the other direction. It was a sad sight; one of the adult parents was on the ground with the dying or possibly dead by now youngster. The parents do care and show it...but life for the survivors goes on. This is likely a common event in nature but one rarely witnessed.

A sad story with a less-sad ending: three weeks later we returned to the same site and low and behold, the remaining two red-tailed hawks and their parents were still in the area. The young ones were still whining but there didn't seem to be the desperation in their tone as was in the earlier encounter with them.

Do **YOU** want to volunteer with the WVRRC? We are always looking for reliable, dedicated volunteers to help with our rehabilitation and education programs. Call 1-800-540-6390 or fill out the Volunteer Application on our website:
www.wvrrc.org.

A Tribute to Spyro

By Katie Fallon



It is with a heavy heart that I write this article. This past February, the WVRRC lost an important member of its education team when volunteers found that Spyro, our male American Kestrel, had passed away in his flight cage at the Center.

Spyro came to the WVRRC in 2002 from Hampshire County. At that time, he was already an adult—once a bird reaches maturity, it's usually impossible to determine its age. In 2002, Spyro could have been as young as two years or as old as ten or eleven. Spyro's injury was the result of being struck by a vehicle; he suffered serious damage to his right wing. The person who found him did not realize she was required by law to turn injured wildlife over to a licensed rehabilitator, and she tried to nurse the kestrel back to health. Unfortunately, by the time the bird reached the WVRRC, the broken bones in his right wing had fused together improperly, and he had absolutely no chance of ever flying free

again. After evaluating his "personality" and temperament, we decided to make him a member of our educational team and give him a permanent home at the WVRRC. Volunteers named him "Spyro" after a children's video game character. In the video game, "Spyro" is a baby fire-breathing dragon; since the kestrel was very feisty—despite his small size—we thought the name fit.

Training Spyro to participate in education programs was a somewhat difficult process. Most raptors use their talons as a primary means of defense, but Spyro also used his sharp, curved beak. Even though his beak was small, he could deliver quite a painful bite—and instead of just nipping, he would actually grab the skin and twist! He was also lightning-quick despite his wing injury.

Even though he could sometimes be a little monster to work with, Spyro soon became popular with the volunteers. When he first came to the Center, we didn't have an appropriate permanent outside flight cage for him, so we held special work-days to build one. Several volunteers went above and beyond the call of duty to cut boards, dig post holes, stretch and staple netting, and construct a special set of perches for Spyro's new home. It was hard work, but when the cage was finished, seeing Spyro living in it was well worth the effort—his favorite spot to sit was inside (or on top of) his roosting box, where he could look into the woods and at the other birds outside, frequently bobbing his long tail.



Spyro meets some of Charleston's finest outside the state capitol, circa 2003

Spyro was a hit at educational programs, too—his loud *kleeeklee!* call always caused audience members to turn their heads. Children thought he was cute, and adults were often amazed that such a small bird could catch and kill field mice. During his five years at the WVRRC, Spyro did more than his part to help advance our educational mission. He traveled to programs all across the state, from Charleston to Parkersburg to Romney and beyond, reaching tens of thousands of people. Spyro will be deeply missed by all who had the pleasure to meet him. I feel fortunate and blessed that I had the opportunity to work so closely with such a beautiful, fearless, amazing creature.

Education Report

By Shannon Dey, Education Director

BIRD DAYS OF SUMMER...

Well, it has been a busy summer for the Raptor Center Education Program. Since May, our volunteers have provided more than 30 programs and traveled over 2,000 miles to educate people all across the great state of West Virginia about raptors! Some of our programs have included visits to public libraries, various festivals across the state, and even to Morgantown’s local bookstores for the release of the last Harry Potter book. One of our more special programs this summer was at Kids’ Day in Morgantown where we officially introduced our new red-phase Eastern Screech-Owl to the public and held a contest to find him a name. The results are in and winning name is... **Rusty!** He’ll be participating in a lot of our upcoming education programs as he goes through the training process, so be sure come out and see him.

We already have some great programs scheduled for early fall as well, including education booths at the Stonewall Jackson Jubilee in Jackson’s Mill, Heritage Days in Hampshire County, and Kids’ Day USA in Fairmont. **We are also taking applications** for enthusiastic individuals who would like to not only learn more about raptors themselves, but educate others too! Volunteering for the WVRRC Education Program is a very rewarding experience and can also help in developing various career skills or fulfilling internship requirements for college students. If you or someone you know would be interested in joining our education team, visit our website and fill out the volunteer application form. Hope to hear from you soon!

Upcoming Events:

- September 2 and 3 - Jackson's Mill Jubilee
- September 7 - MHS Health Fair - 9am - 2pm
- September 8 - Decker's Creek Adventure Day in Morgantown - 12pm - 4pm
- September 9 - Heritage Days in Hampshire County - 2pm - 4pm
- September 22 - Kids Day USA in Fairmont - 12pm - 3pm
- September 23 - National Hunting and Fishing Day at Stonewall Jackson Resort
- November 3 - Mountaineer Week at the Mountain Lair - 12pm - 5pm

Come out and see us this Fall!

WVRRC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Chairman Michael Book
- Operations Director Marilyn Bowman
- Education Director Shannon Dey
- Michael Boyce
- Robert Boyle
- Jesse Fallon
- Katie Fallon
- Lloyd W. Spring, III

Wish List

- Paper towels
- All-purpose bleach-based spray cleaner
- 1/4” diameter natural rope
- Latex gloves
- Heavy welding gloves
- 4-drawer filing cabinet

Rehabilitation Report

Raptor Disposition — January 1, 2007—July 31, 2007

SPECIES	RELEASED	DIED	EUTHA-NIZED	PENDING	TRANS-FERRED	TOTAL
American Kestrel	2	2	0	0	0	4
Barred Owl	0	1	2	1	0	4
Black Vulture	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cooper's Hawk	0	1	0	0	0	1
Great Horned Owl	0	0	0	1	0	1
Eastern Screech-owl	2	0	0	9	0	11
Red-tailed Hawk	0	1	0	2	0	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	0	0	0	0	1
Turkey Vulture	1	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	6	5	2	14	0	27

Eastern Screech-owls Our Most Common Patient (Again!)

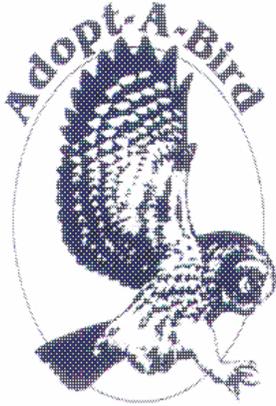
We currently have quite a few raptors awaiting release at the Center. Hopefully, we'll be able to restore them to the wild where they can continue doing their jobs—culling prey populations and maintaining the balance of nature. Our most common patient so far this year is, as usual, the Eastern Screech-owl. As you can see from the chart above, nine of these small raptors are awaiting release. Red-tailed Hawks are usually our second most common patient, but this year we've only treated three so far.

Another interesting point is that we haven't treated any Broad-winged Hawks yet this year. However, as Broad-wings begin their southward migration this September, it's possible that a few will be injured and come to the Center for treatment. Orion, our education Broad-winged Hawk, was permanently injured during his first migration south.

We've also already treated two vultures this year, one Turkey Vulture and one Black Vulture. Vultures unfortunately have somewhat of a bad reputation, but they are essential to the environment; by eating carrion (dead animals) they help stop the spread of disease as well as removing the unpleasant carcasses.

See more about Black Vultures on the next page.

Adopt-A-Bird Application



YES, I would like to adopt a(n) _____

My check for \$ _____ is enclosed.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip Code: _____

SPECIES:	CARETAKER:	STEWARD:	PARENT:
Bald or Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon	\$250	\$100	\$30
Osprey, Vultures, Hawks, or large Owls	\$200	\$90	\$25
Kestrel or Screech Owl	\$150	\$80	\$20

PARENT receives an adoption certificate and the WVRRC newsletter. STEWARD receives a photograph of the sponsored bird, an adoption certificate, and newsletter. CARETAKER is entitled to be photographed with the adopted bird, receives an adoption certificate, and newsletter.



This Black Vulture is recovering from a leg injury. The bird is currently housed in one of our large outdoor flight cages for exercise.

The Black Vulture is one of two vulture species found in West Virginia; the other is the Turkey Vulture. North America's third and largest vulture—the California Condor—is an endangered species and lives in some parts of California and Arizona.

Black Vultures sometimes form loose flocks and roost together in large, dead trees. In flight, they can be distinguished from Turkey Vultures by their "white hands"—from the ground, the ends of a Black Vulture's wings look white, almost like they're wearing white gloves. Black Vultures also have very short, fan-shaped tails, while Turkey Vultures have slightly longer tails. Black Vultures also flap more often in flight than Turkey Vultures.

While there have been reports of flocks of Black Vultures killing livestock (especially newborn lambs) this is a **very rare** occurrence! Like all migratory birds, Black Vultures are protected by the federal Migratory Birds Treaty Act, and harming them in any way is a crime. Vultures are an important part of the ecosystem, and we'll continue to do our best to restore them to the wild.

WEST VIRGINIA RAPTOR REHABILITATION CENTER

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WVRRC MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership in the WVRRC is open to anyone who shares an interest in the Center's mission. Membership is based on the calendar year in the following categories:

Student / Senior	\$7	Supporting	\$35
Individual	\$10	Donor	\$50
Family	\$17	Sponsor	\$100
		Patron	\$500

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

MEMBERSHIP LEVEL: _____

Would you like your newsletter emailed?

Email address: _____

Phone Number: _____

To join, please complete this form,
enclose a check or money order made
payable to WVRRC and send to:

WVRRC
PO Box 333
Morgantown, WV 26507

The WVRRC is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization with 501-c-3 status. All donations are tax-deductible.