

Wild At Heart's (June 2015 Notes)



A Look at May

If we thought April was going to be the "month of note" with its record number of rescued nestling owls and hawks (40% higher than the prior year), we had a different surprise in store for us the following month. May turned out to be remarkable. While we felt very busy during May, we did not know the full extent until we looked at the final tally. During this May, we took in 155 rescues. 155! That comes out to an average of 5 rescues each day!



On just one day, May 20, we logged in 19 owls and falcons; plus, one roadrunner in need of help.

If "just" five birds each day does not seem like much, consider this. Each raptor added to the hundreds already at our facility requires the following:

- ☀ Fresh rodents every day and every night plus the volunteers to feed them.
- ☀ An average of 3 months of care for each injured American Kestrel
- ☀ An average of 3 months of care for each Harris's Hawk infected with "Trich".
- ☀ A minimum of 6-8 months of care for each nestling Great Horned Owl.

Here is a quick summary of the first five months of this year...

- ☀ A total of 379 rescues took place -- 20% more than last year's 317.
- ☀ 40% of all this year's rescues arrived in just one month: This May!

We are tremendously grateful for the many volunteers who rescue and transport injured birds to Wild At Heart for necessary medical treatments and, to help to feed, water, and provide clean accommodations for them.

Special Note: Read our delightful story of the rescue of a hawk named "Houdini" at the conclusion of this newsletter.

What species have come through our doors so far this year?

Through May, we have seen 14 species of raptors. Here are counts of the most common rescued so far this year.

Great Horned Owl = 93



Barn Owl = 87



Burrowing Owl = 68



American Kestrel = 33



Red-tailed Hawk = 31



Western Screech-Owl = 27



Just to round out the list, here are the other species of raptors to come through our doors in need of help so far this year.

- ☀ Flammulated Owl
- ☀ Osprey
- ☀ Peregrine Falcon
- ☀ Swainson's Hawk
- ☀ Turkey Vulture
- ☀ Sharp-shinned Hawk
- ☀ Cooper's Hawk
- ☀ Harris's Hawk

For more information on when you should – and should not – provide assistance to an injured raptor, take a look at our rescue page at this link... <http://wildatheartaptors.org/rescue/>

Good News of the Month



One of the rarer owls we see at Wild At Heart (maybe one per year) is the diminutive Flammulated Owl. Besides being very small (barely over 5.5 inches), it is unique by being the only small owl in the US with dark eyes.

These long distance migrants are very reclusive and prefer the higher mountain elevations with oaks and pines. When one is found in our desert area, it is typically severely exhausted from its 1,000+ mile journey.

This particular Flammulated Owl was rescued from a remote dirt road, very weak and unable to fly more than a few feet. We are happy to say that after several weeks of rest and abundant food, this owl was released back into the wilds at full strength!

Short Stories from Our Volunteers

Being a volunteer at Wild At Heart provides many experiences and, on occasion, some interesting stories. Here is a short anecdote from one of our volunteers helping with one of the important tasks: Rescuing and transporting an injured hawk back to WAH. Here is the volunteer's first-hand account...



I was asked to write a short bit about an adventure of being a volunteer at Wild At Heart, the raptor rehabilitation center where I volunteer time each week. One of my favorite volunteer activities with Wild At Heart has proven to also be one of the more memorable, if not adventurous of activities: Rescuing an injured hawk.

Theoretically, it all sounds rather easy. Someone calls about an injured raptor. I drive out to pick up the grateful bird and place it in a protective box. I drive it back to Wild At Heart for a birdie Band-aid; and, the raptor gives a subtle wink of appreciation: A sort of hawk "Thank you". Right?

Well, not always; at least, not with one special Red-tailed Hawk that soon earned the appropriate moniker of "Houdini". As you may recall from history, Houdini was a famous magician and.....an accomplished escape artist.

It started with a call from James, a rancher near Florence, AZ. James found an injured hawk in one of his pastures. He stated that as an ex-Navy Seal, he had no compunction about handling

a bad guy in the military; however, he did not have the heart to see something so majestic as this hawk suffer or to be dispatched. Instead, he called Wild At Heart.



One hour later, I met James at the field and saw the hawk perched four feet off the ground on a post. The bird then flew about 20 feet, landed on the ground, and began to break into a flapping run. Hmmmm? How injured was this Red-tailed Hawk if it could still flap so strongly? Time to find out. Armed with only the standard tool-of-the-trade, a multi-purpose wrapping device, (i.e., a bathroom towel), I charged across the field in pursuit of the running, kind-of-flying, hawk. After at about 50 yards, I

realized two important things. One, I'm terribly out of shape. Two, I need to run faster to catch this hawk.

Upon reaching the bird, the hawk resorted to its final tactic which was to roll over onto its back, flare out its talon-laden feet, and give me the defiant look of "Go ahead, reach in here if you dare!" This is where that towel came in handy. Accepting the hawk's dare, I sacrificed the towel to the full wrath of those talons. With the talons preoccupied with the towel, I grabbed the bird's legs, lifted it off the ground, and tucked in the wings to secure the hawk.



After a few photos by James, I placed the bird in a box, put that box in the backseat of my truck, and headed to Wild At Heart to receive that hawk thank-you. However, Houdini had other plans. One last trick to pull. While heading down the highway at 65mph, I heard a large THUMP! Then, another THUMP and WHOOSH. Glancing into my rear view mirror, I saw a rather distressed Red-tailed Hawk staring back at me, wings spread wide. In an instant, I had a vision of that scene from the movie, "*Jurassic*

Park", where the *T-rex* chases the Jeep and the little message in the side mirror reads, "*Objects in the mirror are closer than they appear.*"

After a rather hasty stop alongside the road, but not too briskly as to prevent the bird from getting launched into the front with me, the hawk and I shared a few words. I think I made up a few new ones. I pulled over, hopped out of the truck, and closed the door. Standing outside my own truck, I peered in the window to watch the hawk do what all hawks do in the back seat of a truck: Flap. A lot. Meanwhile, people in passing cars stared in befuddlement at a scene that must surely have looked a bit bizarre.

After Houdini (the name came to me at about this time) settled down, I opened the door, got into the back seat with the bird, and used that remarkable versatile tool again: The towel. I pried its talons from the seat cushion, and then my shirt, and wrangled Houdini back into the



box. I was told when I first started to volunteer at Wild At Heart the birds would quickly teach us, the humans, lessons. Those were prophetic words.

Lesson one is to secure the top of the box and, to cover it with a hawk-rescuer's most vital item. Yes, the towel. For those of you who've read Douglas Adam's book *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, I think you'll agree Mr. Adams was spot on when he

proclaimed, "*A towel, it says, is about the most massively useful thing an interstellar hitchhiker can have.*" Too true! Never leave home, or your hawk, without it.

If you found this newsletter to be informative and of interest, please feel free to share it with others who may want know how they can help our birds of prey! Thank you for helping us care for our Arizona raptors!

Wild At Heart is a 501(c)3, non-profit organization. We are volunteer organization dedicated to the conservation and preservation of Arizona's native wildlife through the rescue and rehabilitation of injured and orphaned birds of prey. Our birds and our operations rely on volunteers and your tax deductible donations.