



# The Raptor Chapter

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## Migration Celebration 2006 Was A Major Success!

"I look forward to this every year!" "This is the best Migration Celebration ever!" "I'm bringing the rest of my family next year!" "This is absolutely wonderful!"

Our fifth big Migration Celebration was the most popular ever, bringing 1500 people out despite weather predictions for thunderstorms. Fortunately the weather reports were completely wrong and we had a lovely sunny day for the event at Little Beaver State Park. Folks on the bird and nature walks picked out 34 bird species including water, wading and many woodland species, live raptors from TRAC were on display all day, there was a bug hunt and a photo workshop, medieval reinactors gave the public a taste of times gone by and there were stories, magic and juggling and so much more.

Next year's Migration Celebration will be held on May 12 (the second Saturday in May) at Little Beaver State Park. Plans are already started to make next year's event even bigger. Mark your calendars!

## Alisha Morey: TRAC's 2006 Summer Intern

We are very pleased to have had Alisha Morey filling the 2006 Summer Intern position here at TRAC. Alisha and her family moved to Summers County last year from Stafford, Virginia which is located in the Fredericksburg VA / Washington DC area.

She is returning for her sophomore year at West Virginia University this Fall, majoring in Wildlife and Fisheries Management. As an integral part of her duties at TRAC this summer, she was involved in the Peregrine Restoration Project, a new, ongoing collaborative project between the WV Dept. Of Natural Resources, the New River Gorge National River, Three Rivers Avian Center and other volunteers. (Read her article on page 6 about her experience with the first set of peregrines hacked out in the Gorge!) Alisha also gained first hand experience in training techniques as she worked with our new young educational Great Horned Owl, learned how to care for many different species both as patients and as long-term residents, and helped with the beginnings of the Flight Barn.

She was here at TRAC last year and we were delighted to have her back, especially since WVU is awarding her college credits for her work here. Besides her very obvious love and respect for animals of all types, Alisha is a long distance runner, tree and rock climber and enjoys kayaking and hiking.

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## Up Close & *Different*

Today's ramble is about all about noises and behavior. When one works with animals, getting familiar with the subject is essential. Bird recordings barely begin to cover the subject. Hang out with raptors 24/7 for a while and you will get an ear full, and there are many surprises. Here are a few of my observations.

Take, for instance, the high pitched keening that a Red-Tailed Hawk makes as it flies over its home territory. Distant, clear and wild, it is the sound to which film makers are habituated every time they pan their camera across the barren wastelands of the western desert or rugged mountain ranges. If you are standing right next to the bird when a Red-tail actually makes that sound however, your blood will run cold. The cry is really a cluster of tones that pierces and cracks with menace. The lowest of these tones, not usually audible on the ground from it's origin 'way up in the sky, is reminiscent of the deep rumbling snarl of a bear. This tone is very audible to most other critters on the ground though, and most small ones run for cover.

An American Bittern also growls. Its such an ugly and threatening sound that, if you didn't know better, could be mistaken for an alligator.

In comic contrast, when our Peregrine Falcon is agitated she honks like a duck with laryngitis.

Apex, our imprinted Kestrel, sometimes makes a pathetic small high pitched child-like "boo-hoo" sound. It is an unconsolable sobbing sound that often strikes people as hilarious. It is, in reality, a blatant warning to keep back or die, die, die! If you hear it, don't stick your finger through the cage wire. Apex may only weigh 4 ounces but he can turn to a turf-defending, blood-spilling fury faster that you can say "velociraptor!" If Kestrels were the size of Terriers, no animal smaller than a cow could venture safely into the bird's area. Ironically, this intensity vanishes when he is removed from his cage. On the road, and out of his home territory (i.e. his cage), Apex is an agreeable and cooperative little buddy. When its show time, he

leaps from his carrier onto the glove with an emphatic and happy "Bdddddeep!" which means "Glad to be here! Let's go!"

Twister, the Barn Owl has a repertoire of many calls, none of which is a hoot. His territorial scream resembles a train slamming on the breaks at high speed, and can be just as loud. The mating "come hither to my perch" sound could easily pass for the repetative hideous "squeeka-squeeka" sound that the fan belt on your car makes when it starts slipping. It is accompanied by frenetic foot stomping which we call the Twister Dance. This is often followed by a rapid series of beak snaps with gulping motions with the head which signals "ready or not, you are it". At which time it is time to exit, stage right.

Then there's Hoolie our new Great Horned Owl. Hoolie is still just a youngster just a few months old, and like Twister the Barn Owl, a strong human imprint. Hoolie's vocabulary is still limited to hissing, beak clacking, and a loud raspy, nasal "Breeeep!" No hooting yet. "Breeeep" is the most generic sound and means, so far, "let me out of the cage", "feed me", "play with me", "affection please", excitement, etc, etc. Beak clacks are assigned to raccoons in the yard, dogs she doesn't like, and a few other miscellaneous things, including her jesses if she's tangled them. Hissing is most often, "no I don't want to go in for the night" or when the other birds on the tour misbehave she may hiss at them as if to say "cut it out!". To an imprint like Hoolie, misbehavior means just about anything the other birds do except maybe breathing. Antipathy toward other birds, even her own kind, is the crippling price she has to pay for her status as a human imprint.

I could go on, but I've run out of space. I guess the point is that getting inside their weird little heads is easily half the fun of working with birds. Their communications are familiar and yet alien. Their strangeness is a reflection of what we don't know. But that's OK. They are not like us. But then again, they are.



Ron Perrone, TRAC Education Director

## **Species Spotlight: Great Horned Owl**

**Scientific Name:** *Bubo virginianus*

**Appearance:** large owl with feather tufts (some call "ears" or "horns") on top of head, large yellow eyes. Coloring consists of tawny and black horizontally barred feathers mixed with pure white patches on the front, dark olive-brown and black horizontally barred feathers on back.

**Size:** largest horned owl in North America. Wingspan measures 36 - 40 inches, body length 18 - 25 inches, tail 6.9 - 9.9 inches. Sexes are alike in plumage, but the males are smaller than the females. Males average a little over 2.88 pounds, females average 3.81 pounds or more.

**Range:** all of North America down through the bottom of South America. Year 'round resident.

**Food Preferences:** Very varied!! Can be found eating anything from crickets, beetles, grasshoppers and small rodents on up to and including full grown skunks, snakes, weasels, mink, woodchucks, rabbits, Canada geese, swans, wild turkeys, other raptors, woodpeckers, songbirds, frogs, eels, and fish.

**Hunting Technique:** mostly nocturnal, but can be found hunting any time of day or night. Most Great Horned Owls get very active at dusk and dawn, earning them the classification of a "crepuscular" predator.

**Breeding & Habitat:** do not breed until 2 years old, then raise 1 brood per year in a wide variety of habitats. Monogamous. Most broods are raised in forests or woodlands (often with a source of water nearby), or in swamps, parks, orchards or even semi-deserts.

**Nesting:** can build their own stick nest, but frequently use unoccupied red tailed hawk nests or bald eagle nests, sometimes an unoccupied crow's nest is used. There are also occurrences of Great Horned Owls nesting in hollow logs on the ground, in caves, tree cavities, and among rock outcroppings.

**Eggs:** 2 - 3, dull white, measuring 2.2 inches. Both parents incubate.

**Chicks:** chicks hatch out of the egg after 26 - 35 days, and are immobile, downy, eyes closed. In 35 days they have reached fledgling stage and

at 63 - 70 days they are learning to fly. Both parents tend the young out of the nest until mid to late Autumn.

**Status:** Populations are stable in US, although the first two years of life are perilous: sometimes death comes from natural causes such as starvation, or parasitism. Other causes both for youthful deaths and adult deaths give reason for concern. Some banding studies show that 52 - 86% of early deaths are related to man-made causes, including shooting, trapping, pesticide poisonings and electrocutions.



## **Introducing Hoolie**

Hoolie came to us in May from Cabell County near Huntington. She was found by some people as a very young chick and kept with them for over a month. As a result, she firmly believes that humans are her species, (making her a "human imprint") and therefore is not able to be released back into the wild. Nutritional problems as her first feathers were developing made her tail and main wing feathers brittle so many have either broken or have been damaged, but she will replace these feathers with her first adult molt in a few months. As of this writing (September 2006) Hoolie is a little over 5 months old, and is doing well as a member of our educational raptor team. She weighs 3.5 pounds.

Who's who at  
Three Rivers Avian Center

**2006 Board of Directors**

Bill Grimes, Chair	Dr. Cheryl Melkonian, Vice Chair
Pat Barker, Secretary	Sherry Grimes
Wendy Perrone	Ron Perrone
Terry Carter	Dr. J. D. Carpenter

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Dr. Keath Marx, DVM

**2006 Staff**

Executive Director - Wendy Perrone  
Education Director - Ron Perrone  
Staff Veterinarian - Dr. Bill Streit, DVM, MS  
Summer Intern - Alisha Morey



Three Rivers Avian Center ("TRAC") is a private 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide veterinary and rehabilitative care to WV non-game birds & to educate and involve the public in ecosystem stewardship. The Raptor Chapter is a quarterly publication of TRAC, usually published in February, May, August & November. Members of TRAC receive the Raptor Chapter free of charge - other copies are distributed as funds permit. Public education programs featuring live raptors are available. Call (304) 466 - 4683 or visit our Web page for more info:

**[www.tracwv.org](http://www.tracwv.org)**

**Needs & Help wanted List:**

Paper towels !!!  
(we prefer Bounty, because they last better)

Freezer for raptor, etc. food  
(we need a chest freezer, about 4' L x 2.5' W)

Volunteers to help construct the flight barn

Simple Green cleaner (gallon size preferred!)

Clorox Ultra Bleach - unscented, no substitutes, please

**TRAC Hospice Vets**



*These vets have agreed to donate their talents to TRAC patients. We couldn't do without them. Please let them know you value their assistance too the next time you are in their establishments!*

**Staff Veterinarian:**

**All Creatures Animal Hospital (Dr. Bill Streit) 304-425-9944**  
Stafford Drive Plaza, Princeton

- 
- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| <b>Animal Care Associates</b>            | <b>304-344-2244</b>  |
| 840 Oakwood Rd., Charleston              |                      |
| <b>Animal Emergency Clinic</b>           | <b>304-768-2911</b>  |
| McCorkle Ave., South Charleston          |                      |
| <b>Beckley Veterinary Hospital</b>       | <b>304-255-4159</b>  |
| 215 Dry Hill Rd. Beckley                 |                      |
| <b>Cross Lanes Veterinary Hospital</b>   | <b>304-776-4501</b>  |
| 524 Old Geoff Mtn. Rd., Cross Lanes      |                      |
| <b>Elk Valley Veterinary Hospital</b>    | <b>304-965-7675</b>  |
| 113 Frame Rd. , Elkview                  |                      |
| <b>Good Shepherd Veterinary Hospital</b> | <b>304-925-7387</b>  |
| 3703 MacCorkle Ave, SE, Charleston       |                      |
| <b>Greenbrier Veterinary Hospital</b>    | <b>304-645-1476</b>  |
| Rt.. 219 North, Lewisburg                |                      |
| <b>Hurricane Animal Hospital</b>         | <b>304-562-3321</b>  |
| #1 Davis Court, Hurricane                |                      |
| <b>Lewisburg Veterinary Hospital</b>     | <b>304-645-1434</b>  |
| US Rt.. 60, Lewisburg                    |                      |
| <b>Oak Hill Animal Hospital</b>          | <b>304- 465-8267</b> |
| Summerlee Rd., Oak Hill                  |                      |
| <b>Raleigh County Animal Hospital</b>    | <b>304-253-4787</b>  |
| 198 Ragland Road, Beckley                |                      |
| <b>Stonecrest Animal Hospital</b>        | <b>304-525-1800</b>  |
| Stonecrest Drive, Huntington             |                      |
| <b>Valley West Veterinary Hospital</b>   | <b>304-343-6783</b>  |
| 201 Virginia St. West, Charleston        |                      |



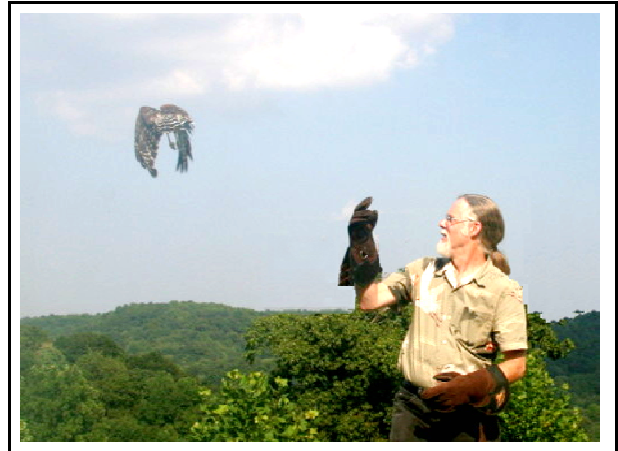
Three Rivers Avian Center and Positive Image Photography are gearing up for our next Birds of Prey photography workshop to be held on Sunday, October 22 from 9 am 'til 4 pm.

Thirteen raptors representing 11 species native to WV will be available for photographing in natural settings, including hawks and owls, an American Kestrel, a Peregrine Falcon, a Golden Eagle and our new (and not quite grown-up) Great Horned Owl. Since these birds are used to being around people, they are excellent subjects. In one day, photographers can take photographs of these raptors that it would take a lifetime to have a similar opportunity to photograph in the wild. An added bonus is that the handlers for these birds are there providing natural history and behavioral notes for each raptor as well as helping the bird find a comfortable position in the best place possible for that one great photograph. Photographers will also be able to pick up technical tips as they need them in Adobe Photoshop CS2 during one-on-one sessions with experienced instructors.

Participants should bring a camera, flash, filters if you like, extra batteries and lots of film or memory cards; many have found a tripod or monopod useful as well. The day is divided into two sections, and participants can sign up for either the entire day (9 am - 4 pm) or the morning (9 am - noon) or afternoon (1 pm - 4 pm) session. Those who decide to register for the full day will receive lunch as part of the package. Full day sessions are \$100, half day sessions are \$50. 50% of the registration fees benefit TRAC and help us care for wild birds.

For more information, contact Steve Rotsch: 304-546-4611, swrkab@aol.com, or visit his website at [www.stevenrotsch.com](http://www.stevenrotsch.com). Those wishing to register on-line or pay with a credit card or PayPal account may do so at his site.

### A recovered gunshot Red-Shouldered Hawk Takes To The Sky



30 senior citizens and their friends and families helped us send this Red Shouldered Hawk male out to a new life near Cato Park in Charleston, WV. This bird was originally rescued by a farm owner who found the hawk on a back pasture-wooded area in Raleigh county in late May. X-rays showed that he was gunshot in the tibia and fibula (lower leg) requiring stabilization of the tibia with a surgical orthopedic pin. Months later, after lots of cage rest and physical therapy, he was relocated into newer, friendlier habitat. The Red Shouldered flew about ¾ mile to a tree then disappeared into a new (hopefully gun-free) area with lots of options to explore.

In other rehab news, we have seen almost equal numbers of Barred Owls and Red Tailed Hawks ( 20 and 19 respectively) and the next largest species intakes tied between Screech Owls and Robins at 11. Top causes for intake are: collisions with vehicle, colliding with other objects, being predated by a cat and having their nest destroyed (usually by having their tree cut down). We have cared for 35 species to date (mid-September) with a 49% release rate.



The public can now view a Web site showing current information about wild bird sampling for early detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in the United States: <http://wildlifedisease.nbii.gov/ai/>. Scientists are now using the newly developed database and Web application called HEDDS (HPAI Early Detection Data System) to share information on sample collection sites, bird species sampled, and test results.

## Peregrine Falcon Restoration

Shrill shrieks roar constantly from the pet carrier that sways on poles held upon our shoulders. The weight digs in as WV DNR's Jack Wallace and I trudge uphill towards the hack site, careful not to jostle the carrier and the chicks inside. Through the carrier's door downy white fuzz balls with dark gremlin faces stare out. Huddling in the back of the carrier the terrified chicks are hardly recognizable as birds let alone *Falco peregrinus*. The seven shrieking fledglings are just a few weeks old but like so many other young in various species their age doesn't keep them from making their feelings known. The fledglings' shrieks bounce painfully on eardrums with echoes that remain long after everyone has left the reintroduction site.

The hack box is set on a rock ledge in the New River Gorge. This set of seven peregrines is the first to come to a West Virginia hack site in over ten years. The project will continue with 3 "hack-outs" per year for 5 years. The site is a historically appropriate site for Peregrines though it is not specific to the subspecies *peregrinus pealei*. These chicks and many other reintroduced peregrines are of the subspecies *peregrinus pealei*, naturally found on the coast of the Pacific Northwest. The peregrines that naturally populate the eastern region are *peregrinus anatum* but due to the use of DDT their numbers and many others' have reduced drastically. There are three subspecies of peregrines found in North America. A subspecies is a particular variation of a species that are capable of producing fertile offspring with any population of the same species. The three subspecies of Peregrine Falcons are a classical example of Gloger's rule. Gloger's rule is one of the many ecological observations of patterns between the environment and animals. Gloger's rule is "animals that live in moist humid climates tend to be darker than animals from arid regions" (Proctor & Lynch p.36). These patterns in coloration reflect on the vegetation found in the area. So the subspecies *pealei* found in the Pacific Northwest coast is the darkest of the three variations because the wet climate there leads to very rich and dark plant growth. Whereas the *tundrius* subspecies is found in northern tundra

areas that are much dryer and produce less vegetation that is lighter in color and therefore the peregrines there are the lightest North American variation. The *anatum* subspecies mentioned earlier is intermediate of the two in coloration and historically found continentally.

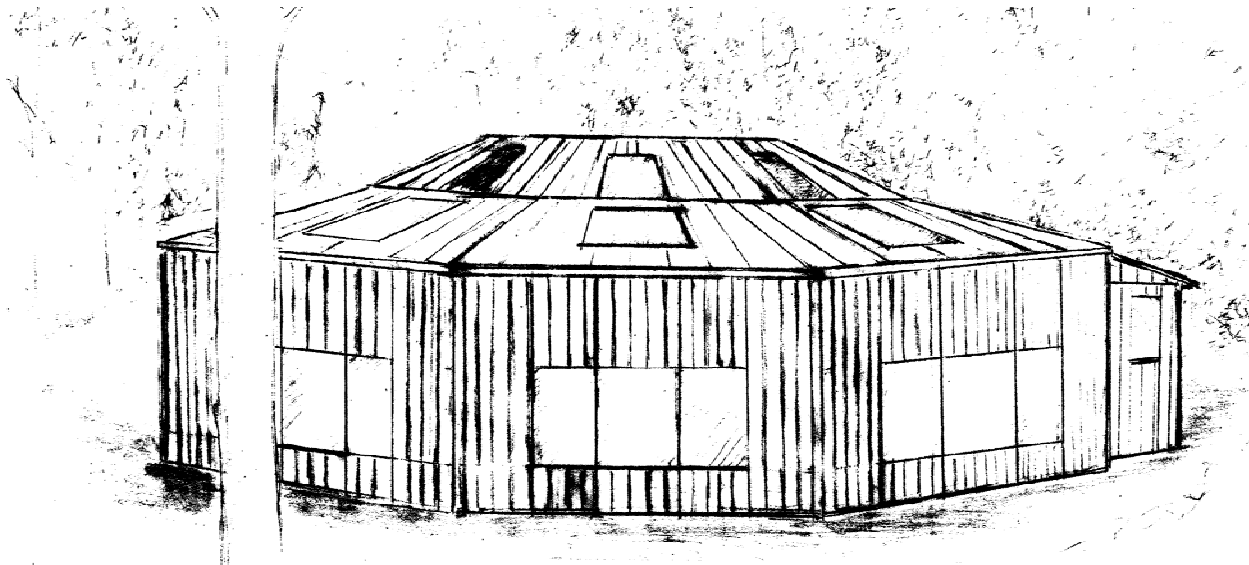
When we reach the site the chicks are placed into the hack box. After all the peregrines are in their new home it's time for feeding. The young peregrines are feed quail. The hack box is arranged so that the chicks cannot see who is feeding them. This is done by the having the only windowed side facing out over the cliffs and by the 5 foot long feeding tube being located off the back and having a slight bend. This prevents the peregrines from associating humans with food so that when they are released they will want to hunt for themselves. When each quail drops down the feeding tube a resounding silence fills the hack box, immediately followed by a communal hiss. This pattern of shrieks, silence and hisses will grow very familiar to all the volunteers over the next few weeks to come until the peregrines are freed from their hack box.

The day after the peregrines are released and for weeks later, we monitor near the hack site for them to see how many have remained in the area. The young peregrines have lost all their fluffy whiteness and gained dark, slim flight feathers. Red Band, testing his landing skills, flies in and lands in the pine tree right above us. Staring at us, he seems to be the one taking notes, not the other way around. Our notes include each of the peregrines' color code and number that are seen on bands above their feet. Each chick is seen at least once although some of the less adventuresome can be seen at just about any given part of the day. Red band, getting tired of us, gives flight to a nearby dead pine tree perch where he spends the next half hour preening his feathers and most obviously ignoring us.

Looking past the mixed trees we stand among, the world opens up and a peregrine cuts across the cloudless sky. We applaud.

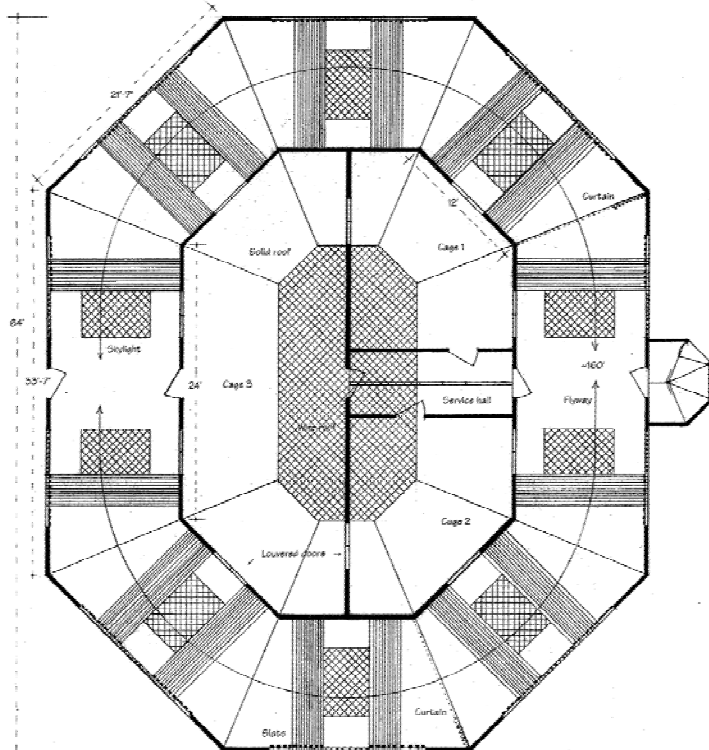
 Alisha Morey, TRAC 2006 Summer Intern

## Flight Barn construction begins



This year the Center's flight conditioning cages are getting a major make-over. They are being replaced with a permanent flight barn which will give us 3 standard sized flight cages surrounded by a 12 foot wide racetrack that will be a continuous flyway, enabling patients to build up more stamina and endurance prior to release. The entire building measures 64 feet by 52 feet. A unique roof allows for weather to enter the building while also providing shelter.

Walls are solid between the cages for privacy, the exterior wall of the "racetrack" is a unique mixture of solid walls, wire mesh and slats. This mixture of wall types allows light and weather in while also providing shelter from severe storms and wind, and has the added benefit of encouraging flying birds to keep moving between light and dark areas. (Going from solid to semi-solid to mesh varies the visual environment and stimulates flying activity.) Construction cost for the entire building is estimated at \$33,000, of which TRAC has obtained \$17,500. Fundraising efforts continue as the work begins.



Construction has already begun on this vital project. If you or your group would like to come help in the construction or donate materials or services, contact either Ron or Wendy Perrone at TRAC: 304-466-4683 or e-mail [trac@tracwv.org](mailto:trac@tracwv.org).

*Top: Artist's concept drawing by Robert Morey.  
Below: interior layout of cages. Design by Avian Haven, an avian rehabilitation organization in Maine.*

*A long-time friend recently looked at our new "Who We Are" brochure and noticed that we were involved & active in areas that the person had not heard about. The suggestion was made to include the brochure info in the next newsletter. So, here's the main part of the brochure!*

### **Who We Are**

Three Rivers Avian Center ("TRAC") is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to providing veterinary and rehabilitative care to threatened wild birds as well as to educating and involving the public in ecosystem stewardship. Founded in 1990, TRAC's 102-acre facility is located in the southern portion of the New River Gorge, between Sandstone and Hinton in Summers County, West Virginia.

Although the patients turned in for care are never available for viewing by the public (for their own health and as mandated by Federal law) TRAC is open for patient intake by appointment 364 days per year and the public is welcome to visit the Center and meet the non-releasable raptors on the first Saturday of May through October from 1 – 5 pm.

### **What We Do**

Veterinary & Rehabilitative Care for non-game & endangered wild birds: Emergency care, surgery, hospitalization and a full range of physical therapy treatments for wild birds are provided by a coordinated network of hospice veterinarians combined with a statewide support crew of volunteers and on-site staff. From hummingbirds to eagles, wading birds to soaring birds, TRAC cares for each species' individual requirements; including diet, perching, water access, caging substrates, light levels, and behavioral traits.

TRAC has treated over 1150 patients representing 96 species between the years of 2000 to 2005, releasing almost half. Recovered patients are usually released back into their native environments to help ensure their long-term survival unless there is some overwhelming reason to release the individual in a safer habitat elsewhere.

\*Public Environmental Education: TRAC's award-winning public outreach programs are carefully designed to help individuals understand the native birds and ecosystems around them and to encourage individuals in ecosystem stewardship. Schools, universities, civic groups, child care groups, state parks and forests are just a few who regularly request our programs, allowing us to reach 76,763 individuals between 2000 – 2005. Also as a part of our public

outreach, TRAC publishes a newsletter "The Raptor Chapter"; maintains an extensive Internet website (www.tracwv.org) with over 500 hits daily; and has created and administers the "Migration Celebration", a unique festival designed to interest the public in West Virginia, our birds and our natural heritage.

The annual Migration Celebration is held at Little Beaver State Park near Beckley, WV on the second Saturday in May (International Migratory Bird Day) with the active support of the WV Division of Culture and History, the WV Department of Natural Resources, the WV Department of Agriculture Insect Survey, New River Gorge National River (National Park Service), WV Falconers, birders, photographers, storytellers, reinactors and many others.

\*Research: Understanding all aspects of a species is a vital part of any wildlife-centered program. TRAC helps provide data for research projects focused on native avian populations and avian habitats. Information is also shared on-line with other wildlife rehabilitation groups around the United States and the world.

### **How You Can Help**

Make a Monetary Donation: As a non-profit, non-governmental organization, TRAC relies on the donations of concerned individuals and groups to help care for non-game wild birds in need. Your donation is fully tax deductible under IRS code 501(c)3. Please give generously.

In the last 20 years, breeding bird surveys have indicated that we have lost over 42% of the migratory birds that used to fill our skies. TRAC is trying to stem the disastrous tide by providing medical care to birds in need and educational outreach to the public to try to prevent further injuries and deaths. Your financial contribution can make a big difference in the lives of our feathered friends.

Invite the Birds to Visit Your Group: The very popular and award winning Birds of Prey in West Virginia program from Three Rivers Avian Center is available now to your group, class or community organization. Each highly interactive program features live, non-releasable raptors, a touchable display of feathers, and brochures on native bird and wildlife care. Each program is tailored to the size, ages and needs of the audience. Presentation honorariums help the Center continue our work caring for wild birds.



# Many Thanks to our Sponsors:

*Your name, a loved one's name or your group or company's name can be listed here for an annual donation of \$150 or more.  
Your donation is fully tax-deductible and will help advance the work of Three Rivers Avian Center.*

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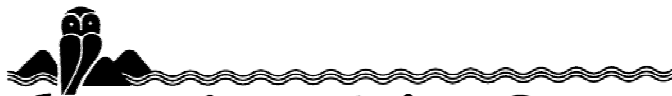
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Harlan Wilson  
James & Mona Wiseman  
*(Your name could be here too!)*

*A special thank you goes to our Grantors:*

**The Schoenbaum Family Foundation**

**The Acker Foundation**



**Three Rivers Avian Center**

HC 74 Box 279 Brooks, WV 25951

304-466-4683 [www.tracwv.org](http://www.tracwv.org)

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