



The Raptor Chapter

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Comanche The Bald Eagle Returns to Freedom

It was Armed Forces Appreciation Day and three hundred people rose to their feet with a giant cheer as a newly healed bald eagle took flight at Pipestem State Park. His strong and sure wing beats took him rapidly out from the transport cage and off over his home territory in the Bluestone Gorge, ending a seven month stay at Three Rivers Avian Center.

Comanche came in as a three year old on October 16, 2004. He was found on a farm in Mercer County near Pipestem State Park with a shotgun shot to his right wrist and multiple fractures on his left ulna. The damage was very extensive and severe. His name was given him by Mark Jorden, a neighbor and volunteer at TRAC who helped with the initial exam and stabilization procedures.

Our staff vet Dr. Bill Streit of All Creatures Veterinary Clinic in Princeton oversaw the extensive medical treatment and physical therapy that brought this special bird back to free flight. As we worked with him, all of us were frequently amazed and impressed with Comanche's willingness to put up with the demands of rehabilitation and with his ability to patiently wait while treatments were carried out.

Bald Eagles are gradually establishing themselves in West Virginia, and can now be spotted in several places around the State, including along the Bluestone River near Hinton,



the Potomac River near Moorefield, and along the Ohio River.

Comanche's release on May 21, 2005 reunited him with the group of 6 that have been living in the area near the Bluestone Dam. The group established themselves several years ago and have been steadily growing in number.

So, if you are watching Bald Eagles near Hinton, watch for one with a silver band (a US Fish & Wildlife Service tracking band) on his left leg. You'll know you've just seen Comanche!

*(Release photo courtesy of John Clemens:
www.clemensphoto.com)*

In this issue . . .

Ron's Page.....	page 2
Species Spotlight: Killdeer	page 3
Needs List & Hospice Vets list.....	page 4
Center News & Notes	pages 5 - 8
Membership & Support Info	page 9

Learning to Relate

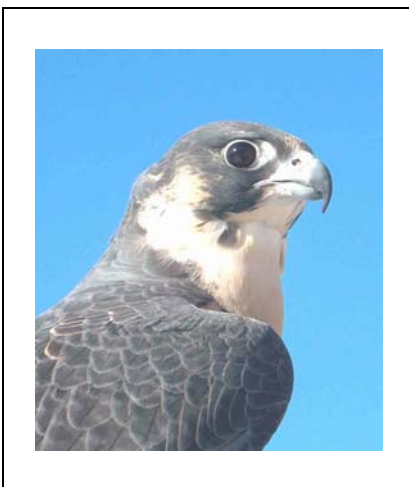
Something that frequently happens during Birds of Prey programs occurs in the form of a question. "How did you know he was going to do that?" Its not that people aren't good at reading a critter's mind, its just that birds are really weird and it takes some concentrated observation to figure them out. But that is what we humans are good at. We mammals usually can figure each other out pretty quickly.

Dogs, cats, and people share not just a basic floor plan but also a shared set of behavioral traits. Its not hard to know when your dog is going to challenge you to play or wants a treat. But birds aren't mammals. Our family trees don't mingle until way back before the dinosaurs.

We humans are the way we are because as mammals go, we were not very strong or fast. We had to diversify our skills and behaviors to keep up with all the brilliant specialists with hooves, fangs and wings. The niche for mid sized bipedal hominids is a pretty precarious place. So, Instead of mastering our environment physically like other creatures, we mastered it with our minds. It was either that or get to the table last, or worse . . . become the entree. We mastered not the arts of speed, mobility, or strength, but of thinking our way into and out of situations. So let us not belittle the evolution of human intelligence. It is a staggering feat of biology. But what if things had been different?

Sometimes I play a little game with myself, imagining what humans would be like if, way back, we'd evolved the need for feathers and then discovered flight. So much of our intellectual development would simply have been unnecessary. Would we need a car, a road, bricks, metal, government, commerce, electronics, agriculture, or any of the implied underlying skills and technologies? What would our homes look like? How would our needs be met and how easy or hard would life be? How would evolution have shaped the economies of our physical biology? Of what practicality would a big heavy brain even be? The power and advantage of flight is so enormous. Once the path towards flight is set, evolution dispenses with so many earth bound necessities.

The mental gymnastics of birds revolve around vision, sound, and the electromagnetic feel of the world. Sensory processing speed is way fast. They are quick to observe, experience evaluate and



judge. They are existential. Their intellectual capacities, like ours, are bound and sharpened by their needs. Some bird species appear to be brighter than others. The raptors, corvids and parrots, albeit for different reasons, are the brightest. And its here that we big brain types often find kindred souls. Once a person cracks the code of signals that birds use to convey their thoughts, it can be a real pleasure to jam with them. But when it comes to raptors, a human does have to keep in mind that outmaneuvering and

eating mammals is the raptor stock in trade. They read our emotional states like an open book. And should they want to communicate, they have real tools.

A case in point: at a recent outdoor display, our Peregrine Falcon "Perry" had been out on her perch for several hours and was happily settled in. It was a beautiful day and the pervading human environment was friendly and low stress. When it was time to pack up and go back in her cage for the ride home, she didn't want to. I put my gloved hand out for her to step up on. In rapid succession, her mouth gaped, her head jerked back and with head feathers flaring, she glared at the glove. She was shocked and highly outraged. She said "WHAT THE..?". Then she spun her gaze right into my face and partially spread her wings. She said "ABSOLUTELY NOT!". Then she screamed long and loudly and continued to stare at me in an effort to intimidate me. When none of this worked, she suddenly became smaller, feathers smoothed, head down and cocked sideways, beak closed. In polite submission she said "please, can I stay out?"

It all took maybe 5 or 6 seconds. I said, "Nope, come on we've got to go home." As she hopped up onto the glove and pulled herself together, I turned to see that a fellow who had come up while this was happening was still standing there, and he was smiling. He said, "Yeah, she sure wanted to stay out and threw a fit, didn't she? And when it didn't work, she asked for permission." I said, "You saw that?" He said, "I have kids."

 *Ron Perrone, TRAC Education Director*



Species Spotlight: Killdeer

Scientific Name: *Charadrius vociferus*

Other Names: chattering plover, killdee, killdeer plover, pasture-bird, field plover

Appearance: A true plover, Killdeers have long slender legs, slender wings and long tail, stand about 10 inches tall and have a wingspan of about 20 inches. Average adult weighs about 3 ounces. Sexes have no differences in size or plumage. Brown back with white belly and two distinctive black bands around the front of the neck and upper chest. The chicks are identical in miniature to the parents, but have one band around the throat instead of two.

Range & Habitat: Killdeer can be found throughout North American and into Central America. Although most plovers are shorebirds, Killdeer can be found literally miles and miles away from any coastline. They can be found in meadows, golf courses, railway yards, large mowed or grazed areas, shopping malls, & other dry upland areas.

Food Preferences: 75% insects, 2% weed seeds, the rest of the diet consists of a wide variety invertebrates. Favorite insects include: ticks, beetles, grasshoppers, caterpillars, ants, dragon flies, caddis flies, spiders, June beetle grubs, centipedes, and earthworms.

Hunting Technique: ground forages, sometimes in shallow water, most often on dry land.

Breeding & Nesting: It is not unusual to find these birds nesting communally in groups of up to 50 individuals. More often they are found in smaller numbers or even one pair alone. A killdeer is sexually mature at one year old. The nest is usually in the open, often in a slight

depression in the ground (will make their own depression in a gravel area), sometimes on flat or gently sloping gravel roofs. More often in meadows, pastures or large lawns, railroad tracks, driveways and gravel parking lots, mowed areas near roads, Nest is lined with pebbles, grasses and weed stalks, carefully designed to blend in with the surroundings. Males are more likely to nest in the same area over and over again, often with the same female from year to year. 1 -2 broods per year, averaging 3 - 5 eggs per clutch. The eggs are heavily blotched with a buff colored background. Nesting occurs between late March (in southern regions) through July. After 24 days of incubation the eggs hatch, the young are able to fly after about 25 days. HOWEVER, within hours after hatching they are capable of foraging and running around on their own. The adults brood the chicks through at least the first 2 weeks after hatching, and the young will stay fairly close to the adults while foraging.

Notes: Killdeer are quick for their size: they have a flight speed up to 55 mph, running speed averages about 5 mph. They are a member of the upland plover family. The "vociferous" name comes because they are so vocal, their common name of Killdeer is an imitation of their call. Often nests where they winter, but in northern latitudes Killdeer can migrate either by day or night. Can live around 6- 7 years in the wild.

It is not unusual to have someone see a small killdeer chick running around and decide that it "has lost it's mother" and has to be rescued. Maybe it's the amazing beauty of the small fuzz ball with such delicate and detailed markings. It is NOT an orphan. Nothing is further from the truth. Unless a killdeer chick is obviously injured in some way, these beautiful chicks need to be left alone. The parents ARE ALWAYS nearby. By the way, we have found one other fortunate trait of these amazing birds: they will care for any killdeer chick that is given to them, even if the chick is put near the adult in the wild. They will call it over and harbor it immediately as one of their own.

Although their numbers are stable, Killdeer are totally protected under State, Federal and International law, under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

Who's who at Three Rivers Avian Center

2005 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

2005 Advisory Board

Curtis Taylor	Dr. Jeff Patton, DVM
Donald Rusk	Tony Liguori
Allen Waldron	Monica Patton, LVT
Ricky Smith	John Sanders
Carol Jackson	Jessica Smith
Bill Benemann	Dr. Keath Marx, DVM

2005 Staff

Executive Director - Wendy Perrone
Education Director - Ron Perrone
Staff Veterinarian - Dr. Bill Streit

TRAC Hospice Vets



Three Rivers Avian Center ("TRAC") is a private 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide veterinary and rehabilitative care to threatened WV 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 environmental education programs featuring live raptors are available. Call (304) 466 - 4683 or visit our Web page for more info:

www.tracwv.org

Needs & Help wanted List:

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

Washing machine in
good, workable condition

Volunteers to help clear ground for the new
flight barn (see page 8)

Plain Clorox bleach

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!

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

Animal Care Associates 304-344-2244
840 Oakwood Rd., Charleston

Animal Emergency Clinic 304-768-2911
McCorkle Ave., South Charleston

Good Shepherd Veterinary Hospital 304-925-7387
3703 MacCorkle Ave, SE, Charleston

Beckley Veterinary Hospital 304-255-4159
215 Dry Hill Rd. Beckley

Cross Lanes Veterinary Hospital 304-776-4501
524 Old Geoff Mtn. Rd., Cross Lanes

Elk Valley Veterinary Hospital 304-965-7675
113 Frame Rd. , Elkview

Greenbrier Veterinary Hospital 304-645-1476
Rt.. 219 North, Lewisburg

Hurricane Animal Hospital 304-562-3321
#1 Davis Court, Hurricane

Lewisburg Veterinary Hospital 304-645-1434
US Rt.. 60, Lewisburg

Oak Hill Animal Hospital 304- 465-8267
Lochgelly Rd., Oak Hill

Raleigh County Animal Hospital 304-253-4787
198 Ragland Road, Beckley

Stonecrest Animal Hospital 304-525-1800
Stonecrest Drive, Huntington

Valley West Veterinary Hospital 304-343-6783
201 Virginia St. West, Charleston

Migration Celebration 2005
was a HUGE success

Over 1200 people participated in our most successful Migration Celebration ever. The event was packed with things to do: photo workshops with Steve Rotsch, birding walks led by Bev Delidow and Jim Fregonara, a bug walk and tutorial with WV Dept of Agriculture's Terry Carrington, a wide-ranging and highly interactive series of displays from the WV DNR, nature walks with Jodi French of the National Park Service, stories and crafts with nationally recognized story teller Granny Sue, magic and juggling with Jim Fregonara, Terry Carter of the WV Falconers shared his expertise and very nice display on falconry, and of course the raptors of Three Rivers Avian Center were also on display.

Thank you to everyone who volunteered and all who participated in this event. Everyone worked hard to make it fun and informative for all ages, and we couldn't do the Celebration without you!

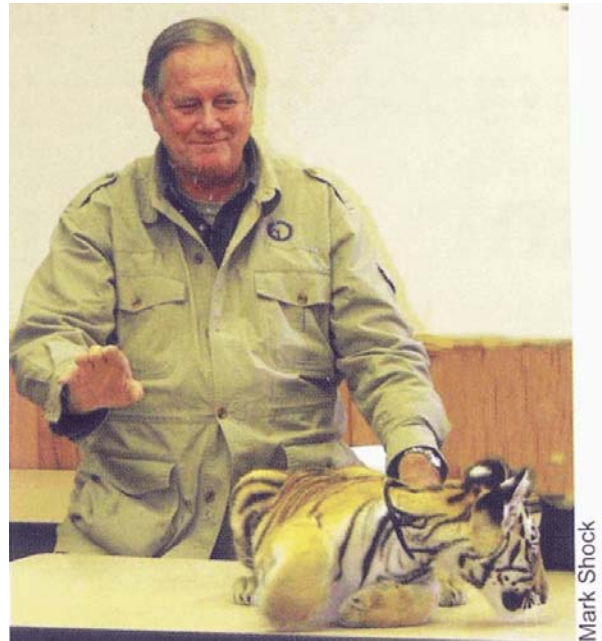
Here's a list of the birds that were seen at Little Beaver State Park by birders Bev Delidow and Jim Fregonara and their groups:

Canada Goose	Mallard
Eastern Phoebe	Tree Swallow
Wood Thrush	American Robin
Red-Eyed Vireo	Black & White Warbler
Yellow Breasted Chat	Scarlet Tanager
Yellow Throated Warbler	Northern Cardinal
Song Sparrow	Chipping Sparrow
Common Grackle	American Goldfinch
Roufous Sided Towhee	Carolina Wren
Ovenbird	Broad Winged Hawk
Mourning Dove	Tufted Titmouse
Blue Jay	Northern Roughwinged Swallow

A very big thank you goes to Bev and Jim for their help and expertise. Their walks were very popular!

The weather was pleasant and sunny from 10 am until about 2:30, then heavy rain began at 3:30 effectively ending the birding walks and the Festival too. Next year we have an order in for COMPLETE sunshine!

The Migration Celebration will be held again next year on the second Saturday of May (May 13, 2006) at Little Beaver State Park and we will be continuing to expand the activities for this family event. Check our website for more details: www.tracwv.org.



Jim Fowler,
the WV Wildlife Center, WV Dept of Natural Resources and Three Rivers Avian Center team up to give Union Elementary School students a "Wild Kingdom" experience

Jim Fowler, shown here at the WV Wildlife Center with a 12 week old orphaned Bengal Tiger in May, came to educate and involve local elementary school students in ecosystem sustainability. (Photograph by Mark Shock). The former TV co-host of Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom, wildlife expert for the Today Show and a long-standing television personality augmented his appearance with a wide selection of West Virginia's native wildlife. Handlers Wendy and Ron Perrone of Three Rivers Avian Center were asked to bring along a selection of the Center's native raptors. Spirit the Golden Eagle and Twister the Barn Owl along with Perry the Peregrine Falcon and Apex the American Kestrel were big hits with the students.

"I grew up watching Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom and it has influenced my interest and concern for the wild creatures of the planet. It is an honor to be asked to stand beside Jim Fowler and emphasize with him the need to care for our native wildlife and ecosystems," said Wendy Perrone, Executive Director of Three Rivers Avian Center. "His message of stewardship of the natural world is one that everyone needs to hear and care about."

15th Anniversary Public Tour Day July 2, 2005

National Park Service and TRAC Board members Pat Barker & Cheryl Melkonian for their support on this special Public Tour Day.

So what does 15 years of operations mean?

- > We've cared for over 2200 patients of over 80 different species
- > over 1000 patients have able to return to their native homes (see article on page 8)
- > more than 1000 educational programs in a wide variety of venues, reaching more than 140,000 individuals ranging in age from pre-school to senior citizens
- > an 1890 square foot building providing full avian clinic services, separate hospital wards for water birds, raptors and songbirds, as well as indoor/outdoor runs for our raptor ambassadors; coupled with a 744 square foot eagle enclosure and physical therapy cages for healing birds
- > 20 + veterinarians who donate their time and care to help birds return to the wild
- > over 40 volunteers who donate their time to transport patients, some also feed & clean cages and help with on-site projects
- > an innovative system of satellite veterinary intake points around West Virginia enabling patients to receive proper care faster
- > 12 educational raptor ambassadors, including a golden eagle, peregrine falcon, barn owl, barred owl, long eared owl, grey phased screech owl, red phased screech owl, 2 different kinds of red tailed hawks, red shouldered hawk, broad winged hawk, and an American kestrel
- > annual production of the Migration Celebration, a family oriented festival celebrating West Virginia's birds & natural heritage, co-sponsored by the WV Dept of Culture & History, the WV Dept of Natural Resources, & the WV Dept of Agriculture
- > funded by private citizens and our educational programs helped by a few grants
- > run by a caring Board of Directors and 2 dedicated staff with 2 assistants (Holly & Allen Canfield) in Buckhannon
- > and encouraged daily by the phone caller who asks: "what kind of bird"



TRAC co-directors Ron & Wendy Perrone show Delegate Virginia Mahan & her husband Jon Mahan some of the 15 years of TRAC memorabilia on display.



Ron Perrone discusses some of the finer points of wild bird rehabilitation with visitors.



Terry Carrington, entomologist with the WV Dept of Agriculture, explains differences in several insect types to an intrigued audience.

All photos are courtesy of Pat Barker. Not shown is Richard Altaire of the National Park Service who led a nature walk around Gwinn Ridge, which is a ridge of land that lies adjacent to TRAC but is a part of the New River Gorge National Scenic River. We wish to thank Terry Carrington, Richard Altaire, the WV Dept of Agriculture, the



***Distinguished Mountaineer
Award
Given to
Ron and Wendy Perrone***

During the festivities at TRAC's 15th Anniversary, Delegate Virginia Mahan presented Ron and Wendy each with the Distinguished Mountaineer Award from Governor Joe Manchin.

In her presentation remarks, Delegate Mahan recalled the release of the rehabilitated bald eagle at Pipestem State Park in May. "An experience like that is only possible through the efforts of these two extraordinary people. The Perrones have dedicated their lives to this effort. They live and breathe it every day, depending primarily on grants and public

TRAC Education Director Ron Perrone, Delegate Virginia Mahan, her husband Jon Mahan and TRAC Executive Director Wendy Perrone at Award presentation July 2, 2005.

support to continue operations. West Virginia is home to many quiet, humble people like these two, but Wendy and Ron Perrone are truly valued citizens of our Mountain State. Their gift to the public and to West Virginia is unsurpassed. Because of their work, we know more about just how unique the Mountain State is. The many fortunate citizens who have seen their programs have a heightened realization of our natural heritage that others might never know. This brand of education, whether received outdoors or in the traditional classroom is invaluable. West Virginia is truly fortunate to have these Distinguished Mountaineers working to remind us of the powerful, yet fragile beauty that surrounds us." *(photo courtesy of Pat Barker)*

2005 Birds of Prey Photography Workshop

Positive Image Photography and Three Rivers Avian Center announce our next Raptor Photography Workshop

Sunday, October 16, 2005.

Photographers are invited to the Three Rivers Avian Center (TRAC) in Brooks, WV for the opportunity to photograph birds of prey on October 16, 2005. Professional photographer Steven Wayne Rotsch and TRAC co-directors Ron and Wendy Perrone will give amateur to professional photographers the opportunity to capture images of West Virginia's birds of prey in natural settings.

Twelve birds of prey will be modeling in natural settings for the cameras. Some of the raptor species include a Golden Eagle, an American Kestrel, a Barn Owl, two different colored Red-tailed Hawks, a Broad-winged Hawk, and a Peregrine Falcon. All 12 raptors will be available individually during both the morning and afternoon sessions. Photographers will also be able to pick up technical tips in Adobe Photoshop during one-on-one sessions with instructors. But the focus of the workshops is photographing the birds.

50 % of the registration fees will benefit TRAC, a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization.

Participants can sign up for the full-day 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. sessions, which includes lunch for \$100, or either the morning 9 a.m. to noon or afternoon 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. sessions for \$50.

Call Steve at 304-344-4688, e-mail Steve at swrkab@aol.com or check www.stevenrotsch.com for more workshop information and a downloadable registration form.

Directions to the Three Rivers Avian Center (TRAC) are available by calling the staff at 304-466-4683.

TRAC would like to recognize two generous Lansing businesses who teamed up to provide a tremendous vacation get-away for our fundraising raffle held during the Migration Celebration in May:

Class VI River Runners donated a trip for 2 on the New River & Opossum Creek Retreat donated an overnight stay for 2 in one of their luxury cabins

Visit their websites:

**www.opossumcreek.com
&
www.onthegorge.com**

Thank you both for your wonderful support!



1000th release for TRAC

On Wednesday September 28th, TRAC was able to have our 1000th release: a first year red tailed hawk that tried to kill a snake and lost the battle. When he was found, the black rat snake had him wrapped in his coils and had just about squeezed all the life out of him. After several weeks of rehab and treatment for a non-venemous snake bite on the wing, we are happy to announce that this youngster is free to resume his life in the wild.

A side note: red tailed hawks and screech owls are the most numerous species that we treat every year. Our 100th release was a screech owl. Somehow it seems fitting that our 1000th should be a red tail.

And in the "What are they building now" category:

TRAC is working on expanding our flight cages. The existing ones are made of polypropelene knitted mesh and have served us well for well over a decade, but they are worn out and need to be replaced. We have been in communication with Avian Haven in Maine who have come up with an innovative design for a flight cage barn that is working great for them and would be perfect for the demands of our patients here. The building is basically an oval pole barn, 64 feet long by 52 feet wide and gives us 4 flight cages of varying sizes, including an outer race track type that will enable birds to fly laps around the inner 3 cages. We are working on raising the \$33,000 that it will take for construction, and we hope to have the building up and in use by summer of 2006.

Here's where you come in gentle reader! Does anyone need firewood? If you are willing to come cut it off the construction site, you are more than welcome to the wood. We have already got more than we need cut here for the winter, and with rising energy prices we thought this might be helpful to those who use wood heat. The only stipulation we have is that the firewood must be for private use and cannot be sold. If you are interested in taking advantage of this offer, call and talk with either Ron or Wendy at 304-466-4683. Please leave a message if we are away from the phone.

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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Animal Care Associates
Fr. Tom Acker
Marz Attar
Anne & Warren Ballard
Evelyn Bradley & Fred Gilkey
Brooks Bird Club
Brooks Bird Club - Handlan Chapter
Joyce Broyles
Terry & Evan Buck
Carl & Sherry Chapman
Charles River Labs
Class VI River Runners
Phillip Cray
Crown Hill Equipment Company
Rodney Davis
DuPont Belle Plant Wildlife Comm.

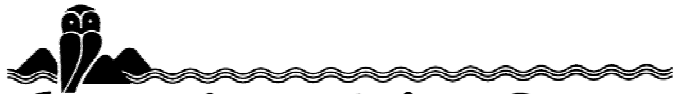
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Clinic
Leon Wilson Bird Club
Cheryl Melkonian
O'possum Creek Retreat
Dean & Gail Osgood
David & Sherry Patick

Tammy Perkins
Ferdinand & Chris Perrone
Jay & Kay Phelps
Kim Poland
Gary Rankin
Claudette Roberts
Joel Rosenthal
Steve Rotsch
Don Rusk & Family
Paul E. Scott
Wild Birds Unlimited - Barboursville
Harlan Wilson
James & Mona Wiseman
(Your name could be here too!)

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The Schoenbaum Family Foundation

The Oakland Foundation



Three Rivers Avian Center

HC 74 Box 279 Brooks, WV 25951

304-466-4683 www.tracwv.org

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