



# The Raptor Chapter

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## Flight Barn Receives Funding for Leon Wilson Memorial Flyway

“Which weighs more, a hummingbird or a ping-pong ball?” This was one of the favorite questions asked by veteran bird bander Leon Wilson. (The answer is a ping pong ball.) Leon delighted in sharing his love of birds with hundreds of friends, relatives, scout and school groups, visitors to a bird banding station, and other birders. He came to a love of nature, particularly birds and plants, at an early age as he grew up in Cabell County. Leon earned his living at a chemical plant in Charleston, but his heart was with his work as a licensed bird bander at the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory on Dolly

Sods in the West Virginia mountains. Fond memories of his generous character are often remembered there and at the yearly Christmas bird counts he hosted in his home area. Leon Wilson died at age 81 on December 21, 1997. In 2003 a birding club was formed and named in his honor: Leon Wilson Bird Club.

At the end of 2007 the Leon Wilson Bird Club disbanded. In a final gift, the Club elected to send the remaining funds from their organization to Three Rivers Avian Center to help complete the “flyway,” the oval shaped non-segmented racetrack around the outside of the building to help birds finish their conditioning prior to release.

We are very honored to receive this important and poignant gift in honor of one of the most revered birders in West Virginia. Although there are still some remaining funds to raise, many have volunteered their time to come help build the flyway. We are hoping to begin this final step in early Spring. Thank you, Leon Wilson Bird Club! What a tremendous gift. *(Photo courtesy of Cindy Ellis.)*

### In this issue....

Ron's Page .....	page 2
Species Spotlight .....	page 3
Hospice Vets, needs list.....	page 4
Notes and News .....	page 5 & 6
Membership info .....	page 7



This article could have started out something like “Saturday, January 5<sup>th</sup> was the third annual Eagle Watch...” But it won’t because we, Wendy and I, who in the previous two surveys froze our butts off and saw exactly 0 eagles, saw 5 this Watch! In fact, there were no long frigid hours of desperate searching. No long distance squinting through binoculars, no wondering out loud, “was that a Turkey Vulture out there or maybe, oh, (sigh) it’s a crow.” Nope, this time we had the best seat in the arena.

We drove out to a turnout on Route 20, one mile south of the Bluestone Dam, parked, set up our chairs, focused the spotting scope on the opposite side of the Lake, and lo, 2 adult Bald Eagles were sitting there directly across from us, pretty as you please. Less than 10 minutes later, one jumped and flew screaming out over Bluestone Lake to chase away a third Bald Eagle - a three year old who had flown too close for comfort. The chase went upstream and around the bend at the Lilly Bridge at the mouth of the Bluestone River, and only the adult returned.

The pair spent the next 4 hours within a quarter mile stretch of the Lake directly in front of us. Later in the day they ran off a first year Bald Eagle coming up from the Dam and put him in a tree a little down stream from us. And just before we packed it in for the day another first year meandered in on our side of the river only to be chased down stream as well.

But the real treat for us was that for the whole time we were there, the adult pair went

about their daily chores. We watched as one went into the river for a bath while the other stood guard from a tree. Then later that day, they switched roles. We watched them dive down and snag a couple of fish and carry them back to the tree for a bite. We watched them meander around the beach poking into things. We watched them scratch and preen. In short, we got to see a normal day in the life of a pair of Bald Eagles. From the way they sat very close together and the way they defended their space, it seemed that maybe they were a mated pair. We hoped as much, anyway.

The annual Eagle Watch is an attempt to get a handle on how the Eagle population is coming along here in the southern New River Gorge area. And the way things seem to be going, the answer is, “pretty good!” Jim Phillips of Pipestem State Park coordinates an intrepid band of some 30 volunteers who fan out along the New, Greenbrier, and Bluestone from 10 AM to 2 PM with the sole purpose of finding eagles and noting their behavior and movements. Then we all meet down in Hinton and pool all our observations. Then Jim spreads it all out along a time line and figures out if there are any overlapping sightings such as our third year juvenile who was (probably) spotted a short time later upstream at Bertha. The results are then published. And this year, the news is better than last year, which was better than the year before. There is a good chance that this Winter, 9 Bald Eagles and 2 Golden Eagles were in the area.

Since both Bald and Golden Eagles are seen here year round, there is a good chance that are active nests somewhere. So, there’s another survey coming up March 15 from 10 AM - 2 PM Sound like fun? Contact Jim Phillips at Pipestem State Park (304-466-1800 ext. 344) if you’d like to help out.

So now it is February 4, its raining, I’m stuck inside doing inside things and wait ... the phone just rang ( I mean it, really!) ... and its Tonry, our neighbor. He just saw his first ever adult Bald Eagle & it was down at Brooks ... even as I was writing this. So many eagles, so little time. -Ron Perrone, TRAC Education Director

## **Species Spotlight: Northern Harrier**

**Scientific Name:** *Circus cyaneus*

**Size & Appearance:** wingspan is 42 inches, body is around 16 ½ inches long. Harriers have a distinct owl-like facial disk and a distinctive white patch on rump, long tail, long rounded wings. Can soar very high during migration. Adult males differ from adult females in plumage: male is pale grey with paler color underneath and narrow dark bars on a grey tail, female is buff underneath with dark streaks on her breast, belly and underwing, dark brown above. Immatures resemble the adult female, except for the dark streaks.

**Range:** Winter south to northern Columbia, breeding range is up through Canada and Alaska.

**Food Preferences:** mice, meadow voles, birds, snakes, frogs, grasshoppers and other insects, some carrion.

**Hunting Technique:** hovering low (less than 7 feet off the ground) flight, coursing back and forth, finds prey mostly by sound.

**Breeding & Habitat:** found on prairies, savannas, sloughs, wet meadows and marshes. can be found in higher elevation open meadows during migration in WV. Polygynous, females incubate and feed the young, raise one brood yearly.

**Nesting & Eggs:** Nest is on slightly elevated ground or in thick vegetation, of sticks & grass and lined with fine materials. 5 eggs in average nest. Roost communally when NOT in breeding season.

**Status:** Not a common bird, but not on the watch list for rare species. Most often seen during migration seasons.

**Notes:** We received a gunshot first year male northern harrier from the Montgomery area (Fayette County) on January 29<sup>th</sup>. Our Staff Vet, Dr Bill Streit, was able to place a pin in the shattered wing, and the bird is recuperating well.



## **Mark your Calendars!**

Join us for these upcoming free events! A full schedule of activities is available on our website: [www.tracwv.org](http://www.tracwv.org)

**March 6 9am -2pm** Wildlife Diversity Day at the State Capitol Rotunda. Live exhibits (including TRAC's raptors!) Displays, games, hands on learning and lots of fun for all.

**March 15 10am - 2 pm** Eagle Watch Day. Contact Jim Phillips at Pipestem State Park: 304-466-1800 ext 344. Binoculars are a must, a spotting scope, sandwich and beverage really help!

**May 3 1pm - 5pm** Annual Open House at TRAC. Tours of the TRAC educational raptors and facility grounds. Call for directions: 304-466-4683. Fun for all ages.

**May 10 9am - 5 pm** TRAC's Annual Migration Celebration 2008 at Little Beaver State Park in Raleigh County. Live birds of prey, photo workshops, storytelling, bird, bug and nature walks, displays, games, and much more! A full schedule for the Festival will be on our website in April.

Three Rivers Avian Center is proud to announce the support of  
**The H. P. & Anne S. Hunnicutt Foundation** for our work to care for West Virginia's wild birds and in support of our environmental educational outreach.  
Thank You!



## TRAC Hospice Vets

These veterinarians listed below have kindly agreed to donate their talents and veterinary care to TRAC patients. We couldn't do our work without them. Please let them know that you value their assistance too!

TRAC Staff Veterinarian: Dr Bill Streit  
All Creatures Veterinary Clinic 304-2-425-9944  
Stafford Drive Plaza, Princeton

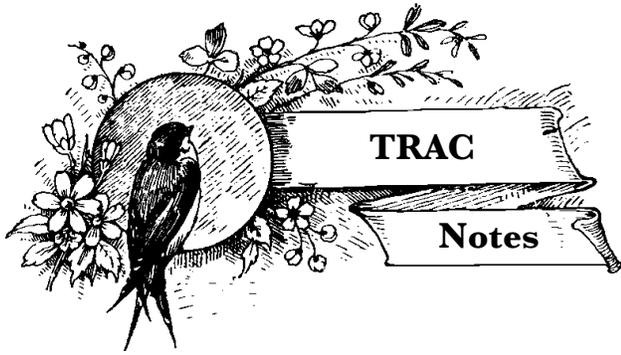
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Animal Care Associates	304-344-2244
840 Oakwood Road, Charleston	
Beckley Veterinary Hospital	304-255-4159
215 Dry Hill Road, Charleston	
Cross Lanes Veterinary Hospital	304-776-4501
524 Old Geoff Mtn Road, Cross Lanes	
Ceredo-Kenova Animal Clinic	304-453-6384
750 "C" Street, Ceredo	
Country Roads Veterinary Clinic	304-586-0700
3420 Winfield Road, Winfield	
Elk Valley Veterinary Hospital	304-965-7675
113 Frame Road, Elkview	
Good Shepherd Veterinary Hospital	304-925-7387
3703 MacCorkle Ave. SE, Charleston	
Greenbrier Veterinary Hospital	304-645-1476
Rt 219 North, Lewisburg	
Hurricane Animal Hospital	304-562-3221
#1 Davis Court, Hurricane	
Kanawha Co. Animal Emergency Clinic	304-768-2911
5304 MacCorkle Ave SW, South Charleston	
Monroe Veterinary House Calls	304-667-2365
Union	
Oak Hill Animal Hospital	304-465-8267
Summerlee Road, Oak Hill	
Raleigh County Animal Hospital	304-253-4787
198 Ragland Road, Beckley	
Stonecrest Animal Hospital	304-525-1800
#1 Stonecrest Drive, Huntington	
Valley West Veterinary Hospital	304-343-6783
201 Virginia Street West, Charleston	

**D**o you have trouble with birds hitting your windows? Artist and author David Sibley enlisted the help of his two young sons to come up with some sort of commonly available, easy to use bird strike deterrent. They discovered one of the best and fastest thing to have in the anti-window-strike toolbox is the common florescent highlighter such as you might use to highlight text on a printed page or in an article. Common in most households, it turns out that you can use it to draw a grid of lines on the inside of a window (and it doesn't matter if it's a double-paned window). The lines should be about 2 - 2 ½ inches apart, and should cover the entire window. Birds see the lines and realize they can't fly through the squares. The only drawback is that you need to re-draw the lines about every week or so because the ink gradually deteriorates.

We heard about this from an Internet Listserv posting that directed us to his website blog: <http://sibleyguides.blogspot.com>. We tried the idea here at TRAC on a couple of troublesome windows and found it to be very effective. Sometimes windows do fine most of the time but on one day, for whatever reason we can't figure out, that window will turn into a reflective mirror that birds seem to run into. In those cases, the highlighter is literally a life saver. For those windows that continually have troubles if the highlighter is gone, we still prefer the Widowalert decals that use UV light to deter strikes: [www.windowalert.com](http://www.windowalert.com).





## A Quick synopsis of 2007

**O**n the rehabilitation front, TRAC had a slightly lower intake than last year, 163 patients. Those patients represented 38 different species including raptors, wading and water birds, songbirds and woodpeckers. A very unusual species for us was a Saw Whet owl we received in late October. We had the highest release rate in years: 55.5%. Although our patients came from 26 counties all over the State, Kanawha county, Raleigh county, Summers county, and Greenbrier county had the most. The top cause of injury was being hit by a vehicle, another was collisions, mostly with windows. Cold weather in January 2008 seems to have caused a lot of problems for birds, especially raptors, and our intake numbers for January are the highest for several years.

The Education Program had an outstanding year. We reached our largest audience total ever: 16,605 people, and expanded our outreach with programs in Canton, Ohio and Cadiz, Kentucky. The TRAC website averaged 567 daily hits, with our Upcoming Events page among the most popular. Our educational screech owls Clara and Casey died of old age during the Summer, and in December we lost our male American Kestrel Apex (see pg 6). However, during the Fall and Winter we received two non-releaseable screech owls that are good educational candidates and they have adapted very well. The red phase screech is named Rudy, the grey phase screech is named Thomas. This leaves us with 13 educational

raptors, which include 6 owls, 4 hawks, 2 falcons and a golden eagle. This list of course includes public favorites Twister the Barn Owl, Hoolie the Great Horned Owl, Perry the Peregrine Falcon and Spirit, the Golden Eagle.

Already members of the North American Association of Environmental Educators (NAAEE) and the National Association for Interpretation (NAI), in March TRAC added the nascent WV Association of Environmental Educators to our list. In April we officially adopted the NAAEEs' Guidelines for Excellence. These are a series of 6 key elements agreed on by an extensive national peer review process that establish a foundation for more effective environmental education programs. We put those guidelines to work to develop a two day seminar for Broadbent Wildlife Sanctuary of Irvington, KY, teaching how to develop a full educational program from the ground up featuring raptors. The hands-on seminar was presented in early January 2008 to rave reviews.

And of course, there is the Peregrine Restoration Project! TRAC is coordinating with the National Park Service-New River Gorge, the WV Dept of Natural Resources and the College of William and Mary to help restore the Peregrine Falcon to its native habitats in the Gorge. 2007 saw the largest release ("hack out") of peregrines since restoration efforts began in the USA, and it was done right here in southern West Virginia. We released 24 peregrine youngsters in three releases in June. On July 20 and 21<sup>st</sup>, after the birds had time to become strong fliers, we trapped 6 of them and attached light weight satellite transmitters to their backs and let them go again. The National Park Service - New River Gorge began a tracking map on their website, which can easily be accessed from a link on TRAC's website front page: [www.tracwv.org](http://www.tracwv.org). At last look, those peregrine wings are working just fine! We are hoping to see some of the birds released in 2006, the first year of the project, start to show up to evaluate the Gorge for nesting opportunities this year. In the meantime there is more work to do...



## In Memory of Alice Knight

**A**lice Knight died suddenly on January 18, 2008 of a sudden massive neurological aneurysm. She was one of those rare people who had the ability to be tremendously prolific artistically, maintained a very active and busy life, had a devoted family and was delightful to be around. She lived in Charleston, West Virginia.

Alice came to many TRAC events and displays in Charleston and surrounding areas and participated in our photography workshops. She was a Master Naturalist, a devoted birder, animal lover and advocate for nature and the environment. This photograph was taken when she attended our release of a healed up female Peregrine Falcon at the New River Gorge Bridge in February 2007. *(Photo courtesy of Terry Carrington).*

At a gathering to remember Alice and her life, a collection was taken up to send to some of her favorite causes. Three Rivers Avian Center is happy to accept the donation of \$75 in her memory from that collection. Whenever we had talked with her, she was always asking what patients we had in at the time and how were they doing. To honor her, we are putting the funds to work right away to help care for the large influx of patients we've received in the last weeks, including a first year Barn Owl and a Northern Harrier. We expect to be able to release both birds.

**A**pex, our staunch and remarkable friend of many years has died. He was killed by a wild screech owl who was healing up from a broken leg in the room behind Apex's outdoor cage. A gust of wind blew the door open between them on December 16, 2007. Apex went into the room and the screech owl attacked and killed him.

Apex was a male American Kestrel who was robbed from the nest when he was just a young chick. Because he was forced to spend several weeks in the living room of the person who abducted him, he grew up thinking that humans were his species. He became a human imprint. This made him non-releaseable despite the fact that he could fly well and seemed otherwise normal.

Despite his 4 ounce size, his personality could fill a room and he was well noted for his antics both at TRAC and out doing educational programs in the public. Many visitors to TRAC enjoyed watching him fly up to the exam room window to sit on his perch to watch what was going on inside the room. Others delighted in his territorial displays when they walked by his outdoor cage. At educational programs or at our display booths he was always a favorite, his tail and head bobs often causing watchers to chuckle. *(Photo courtesy of Caleb Keniepp)*

**A p e x** was with TRAC for 7 years, from the time he was just a few months old. He was featured on the TRAC Holiday card sent to members this past year. He died shortly after the cards were printed and as they were being mailed out. We miss him.



Become a new member or renew your membership and you'll help TRAC continue to care for West Virginia's wild birds. Feathered Friend Sponsors are members who also receive a certificate of sponsorship with a photograph of their chosen raptor from our educational raptor stables. Those who are members at the \$150 or higher level have the option of being listed on the back of the newsletter. All donations and memberships are tax-deductible under IRS code 501(c)3.

For those who wish to purchase t-shirts, polo shirts, stickers, patches posters or CD's , we encourage you to please visit our website [www.tracwv.org/generalstore](http://www.tracwv.org/generalstore) **IT IS UP AND RUNNING!!** There you will find full color pictures of all the above and the opportunity to purchase them using Paypal or your credit card. *New item alert:* we have a limited supply of dark blue t-shirts with a drawing by Roger Tory Peterson of two peregrines; the TRAC triangle logo is in white on the sleeve.

Memberships and Feathered Friend Sponsorships can also be purchased directly from the TRAC website if you would prefer to pay using a credit card or Paypal account.

### Memberships

Eagle	\$1,000+
Falcon	\$500+
Owl	\$250+
Sponsor	\$150+
Patron	\$100+
Benefactor	\$75+
Supporting	\$50+
Family	\$25+
Individual	\$10+
Feathered Friend	See other box

### Feathered Friend Sponsorships

Spirit	Golden Eagle	\$60
Ayla	American Kestrel (female)	\$30
Perry	Peregrine Falcon	\$30
Robbie	Barred Owl	\$30
Twister	Barn Owl	\$30
Ginger	Long Eared Owl	\$30
Rudy	Eastern Screech Owl -red	\$30
Thomas	Eastern Screech Owl - gray	\$30
Hoolie	Great Horned Owl	\$30
Nick	Red Tailed Hawk	\$30
Harlan	Red Tailed Hawk -dark morph	\$30
Kendra	Red Shouldered Hawk	\$30
Chip	Broad Winged Hawk	\$30

We are *elated* to announce that the long-awaited General Store is finally up and on the web page: [tracwv.org](http://tracwv.org). All funds from the site will be used to help TRAC care for wild birds and educate & involve the public in ecosystem stewardship. If we are out of a particular size of T-shirt that you want, let me know. I'll be ordering new ones in late March or so. -wp

**Remember to check your newsletter mailing label for your current membership level and expiration date!**

All donations are tax deductible under IRS code 501(c)3. Your support is vital to our success!

Thank you.

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_ 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 tax-deductible & will help advance the work of Three Rivers Avian Center.*

All Creatures Veterinary Clinic	Becky Carter	Greenbrier Dist. Of WV Garden Club	David & Sherry Patick
Animal Care Associates	Carl & Sherry Chapman	Dwight & Jane Griffith	Jeff & Monica Patton
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Margaret Ballard	Crown Hill Equipment Co.	Roger Hardway	Diane Perrone - Silver
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David & Martha Brumfield	Rodney Davis	Kanawha Co. Animal Emergency Clinic	Gary Rankin
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Brooks Bird Club	Gary & Betty Ellis	Bev & Tom Kinraide	James & Mona Wiseman
Brooks Bird Club - Handlan Chap.	Diana Everett	Leon Wilson Bird Club	<i>(your name could be here too!)</i>
Joyce Broyles	The Forman & Frame Family	Glade Little & Jennifer Soule	
Terry & Evan Buck	Good Shepherd Veterinary Hospital	Dean & Gail Osgood	

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The Acker Foundation & The H. P. & Anne S. Hunnicutt Foundation**

