



# The Raptor Chapter

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A publication of Three Rivers Avian Center

Spirit the Golden  
is coming to the WV Capitol  
March 23, 2005 from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

For those of you who were unable to come to the big "coming out" ceremony for Spirit, our 2 year old male Golden Eagle this past November, here's another great opportunity to meet this magnificent bird in person. Spirit will be joining the Three Rivers Avian Center team at the WV Dept of Natural Resources Wildlife Diversity Program's Rotunda Day on Wednesday, March 23 in the Capitol Rotunda. We will also be bringing along some of our other well-loved educational ambassadors: Perry the Peregrine Falcon, Twister the Barn Owl, Apex the American Kestrel, Robbie the Barred Owl and others. Wendy, Ron, Pat and Liz will be there to introduce you personally to these special raptors, answer questions and share insights into the wonderful world of West Virginia's wild birds.

The Center's display is a part of Wildlife Diversity Day at the Capitol, hosted by the WV Dept. Of Natural Resources ("WVDNR"). Wild, Wonderful West Virginia is showcased beautifully with a wide diversity of agencies and organizations with fun, interactive displays including butterflies, insects, fish, snakes, raptors and mammals. Learn about taking care of our streams and rivers, what a snake really feels like to hold, amazing insects that drive our diverse ecosystems, how a feather works, how to use a spotting scope and so much more.

**See you at the Capitol on March 23rd  
and remember to bring your camera!**

## TRAC turns 15 this year!

Yep, it's true. Three Rivers Avian Center will be celebrating our 15th year of caring for West Virginia's wild birds this year. As always we will be hosting our normal free public tour days of our facility and resident raptors on the first Saturday of May - October from 1 - 5 pm, but in addition we will have a special celebration on July 2nd from 1 - 5. Free hot dogs, face painting for the kids, an egg hunt and a series of fun, interactive small workshops on how different animals hear, feather care, feeder tips, bird walks and more. Check out our web site for more information:

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

Also, this year at some point we will be releasing our 1000<sup>th</sup> bird back to the wild. Bookmark our web page and keep checking it for news of this event as well as updates about the gunshot Bald Eagle we have been rehabbing. These releases will be fun, newsworthy events and you won't want to miss the excitement! See you there!

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## Tunes from a Chickadee

This Spring I am determined to capture on digital recording a particular Chickadee who haunts our place. He's been here a few years and I am worried that since he may be an old timer I may have missed my chance.

Chickadees have a limited number of notes to work with when they sing. Most bird recordings have the old standard "Chick -a dee-dee- dee" call but there is so much more can be done with 3 or 4 notes. Simple is not the same thing as unimaginative. As an example, consider Beethoven's ninth symphony (remember... bum-bum-bum-**BUHM!**). Our little male Chickadee uses his 3 or 4 notes and has in the past strung them together in very creative ways. If I can catch him at it this year, I'll share it with the world on our web site. This guy has utterly blown me away. He is a genius. Two years ago, I walked out onto the porch and spotted him perched unobtrusively on the Hickory tree branch not quite 20 feet away, singing his heart out. His act was, for lack of better words, very emotional. The little sucker even had his eyes closed.

From an evolutionary point of view, this didn't strike me as a particularly safe or logical adaptation. Doctrine holds that bird song functions as a basic communication tool, that it is hardwired, and that while it is adaptive over time, any creature whose brain is no bigger than a raisin isn't going to get much past the "Hubba-hubba-here-I-am" song of mate attraction or "Everyone on notice! This turf is mine!" But mate attracting and territorial songs are usually accompanied by behaviors that deliberately draw attention to the singer. Birds singing these songs move from place to place and adopt rapid motions and postures. This act was different. This little sucker was all about holding very still with his eyes closed. He was focused inward and seemed oblivious to the world.

His tunes were very quiet, and very slow. They meandered with pauses and corrections even as he sang them. At times he mimicked the White Throated Sparrow song. He used only 4 notes but with appropriate additional sharps and flats for major and minor key changes and that is

what particularly stuck in my ears. The phrases were sometimes 7 notes long and contained slurs, dotted half notes and triplets. He used amplitude changes at the front, middle and end of the phrases. He went on for several minutes without repeating and when he stopped, he opened his eyes and left.

Last year he was back (at least I think it was him). Same tree, same kind of rambling improvisations and there I was, caught off guard again. Before I could gather up my recording gear, he quit. I'd missed the session again.

Bird song can be beautiful to human ears but its purpose is not to entertain us. We like to call it a hardwired, raisin-brain, function of biology sort of thing. But this bird wasn't following any kind of a road map laid out by his genes to call a mate or stake territory. These tunes were new. I really think he was singing to himself. The bugger was quietly wandering around his imaginative landscape the same way I do when I'm singing or playing guitar. Musicians sometimes joke about

this amongst ourselves because it is a hard experience to discuss with people who haven't been there. It's like dreaming awake.

That is why the moment on the porch was so profound for me. Using the primal urges of his genetic programming and his little raisin sized brain 4 note toolbox, he performed something we like to call in ourselves a sentient activity, a willful self aware act of creation. He was as good at it as any human and better than most. Up in that tree, as musicians say, he was jamming away. It was a transforming moment for me.

So, this year if he returns to the hickory tree I intend to be ready with the latest digital technology in hand in an effort to reaffirm my belief that the gulf between those other creatures and ourselves is not so wide after all. I will use my genetic programming as well as my learned behavior of listening to birds when they sing. If I get it right, I'll pick up some very cool licks for my own creative projects. A little plagiarizing is OK as long as you give credit to the original author - no matter what size or how feathered he is.



Ron Perrone, TRAC Education Director



## **Species Spotlight:** **Bald Eagle**

**Scientific Name:** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

**Other Names:** American Eagle, fishing eagle, white-headed sea eagle, Washington eagle, thunder eagle, thunder bird.

**Appearance:** probably the best known of the US raptors in its adult plumage. As an adult the head and tail are white with the rest of the plumage a dark brown. Immatures have a dark head and neck with mottled dark and buff feathers over rest of body, buff feathers are most often seen on the belly area. Head and tail start to molt after first year resulting in the familiar white head and tail after they are 4 years old. Adults and 3rd year sub adults have yellow eyes, immatures have brown eyes. Beak of immatures is dark, by the time they are 3 years old it starts changing over to yellow, by 4 years old the beak is fully yellow. Feet are stocky, yellow with black talons. Legs are shorter in proportion than a golden's legs, and the hocks are unfeathered.

**Size:** a very large bird, close in size to the Golden Eagle. Similar in flight to a vulture but obviously heavier bodied. Body is between 27 - 35 inches, wingspan is between 71 - 89 inches, weight averages 9 - 10 pounds. There is no remarkable difference between males and females either in weight, wingspan, wing cord measurement or plumage. Blood tests or feather chemistry tests remain the most reliable indicators (until, of course, one lays an egg!)

**Range & Habitat:** found throughout the contiguous 48 United States, up into Canada, with large populations in Alaska. Most individuals

leave inland northern breeding areas in winter unless they have a protected, warmer water area. They prefer estuaries, large lakes, reservoirs, major rivers and some seacoast areas. Good perching trees are required!

**Food Preferences:** noted for their love of fish, bald eagles will also hunt waterfowl, small mammals, seabirds, and eat fresh carrion.

**Hunting Technique:** Swooping, sometimes low patrolling glides, or may perch in a tree overhanging a good fishing or hunting spot. Capable of flying on average between 35 - 45 mph, they often pirate food captured by other raptors - especially other bald eagles and osprey as well as from crows and gulls.

**Breeding & Nesting:** The bald eagle nest can be gigantic: more than 6 - 20 feet across, up to 12 feet deep and weighing up to 4000 pounds. The nests are built out of sticks mainly, added to yearly with more sticks as well as mosses, pine needles, grasses, feathers or other soft materials as interior liners. Nests are used and enlarged over and over again for decades, and are built by both the male and the female. They do not mind periodic loud noises next door either: Kennedy Space Center in Florida has 5 active bald eagle nests near the shuttle launch pad that are inhabited from September through May and average 1 to 2 chicks per year, which is normal for bald eagles. Nests can be found in view of water in trees 10 - 150 feet off the ground, on rocky promontories, or on islands or on the ground. Usually only one chick out of the nest survives to fledge - the weaker sibling(s) are killed by the dominant chick. Bald eagles mate for life and are quite gregarious throughout the year, preferring to roost at night with other bald eagles especially post-breeding season. They may travel huge distances, but normally return to nest within 100 miles of where they were raised.

**Status:** History indicates that when Europeans first came to North America, there were about half a million bald eagles across the country. By 1967 the population in the lower 48 states had declined to about 1000, and they were listed as Endangered. By 1999 enough of the species had recovered to be lowered one notch to Threatened status, where they remain today.

## Who's who at Three Rivers Avian Center

### 2005 Board of Directors

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### 2005 Staff

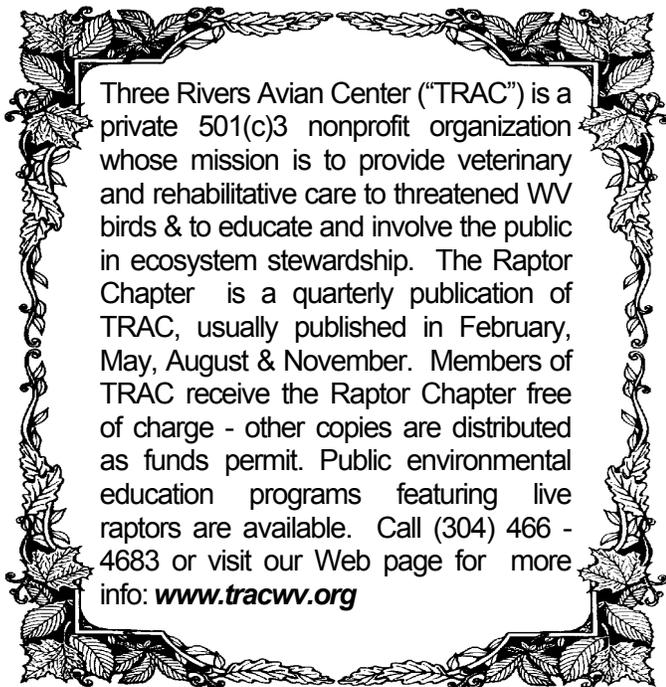
Executive Director - Wendy Perrone

Education Director - Ron Perrone

Staff Veterinarian - Dr. Bill Streit

### 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!*



### Needs & Help wanted List:

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

Volunteers for Spring clean-up

Volunteers to help prep for  
new flight cages

Heating pads for baby season

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



### **Final Rehab Stats From 2004:**

We still have one case pending from 2004, the gunshot Bald Eagle (more about him later) but the rest of the numbers are in. We finished 2004 with an intake of 198 patients representing 43 different species. 4 of the patients turned in were Dead on Arrival, leaving us with 194 patients that we could work with in any way. We were able to release 101 of those patients back into the wild (51% release rate) and when we can release the Bald Eagle that will bring the release rate up to 52%. 49 were euthanized due to the severity of their injuries and 42 died, while one patient, Spirit the Golden Eagle, was transferred to our permanent Educational Raptors stable.

Looking over the 43 species, most groups of non-game birds are represented. A few of the songbirds include: a northern waterthrush, 3 goldfinches, 4 downy woodpeckers, a lesser night hawk (a rare bird for the State), a pine warbler, 7 hummingbirds, 6 song sparrows, 2 wood thrushes, and 21 robins were cared for. One each of Golden and Bald Eagles, 9 coopers hawks, 8 great horned owls, 7 red shouldered hawks, 22 red tailed hawks, 12 American kestrels, and 3 sharp shinned hawks, and 15 barred owls represented some of the cared-for Raptors. Water birds included 1 great blue heron, 3 pied-billed grebes, 2 coots and 1 green heron.

A full listing of the species given to TRAC for care in 2004 and their ultimate disposition is available on our website. If you have turned in a bird for care during 2004 and would like to know how it did, please feel free to e-mail us or call us and we'll find the record. Be sure to include your name, the closest town if possible and at least a rough idea of the date it was turned in. Thanks!

### **The TRAC Website is easier to navigate!**

To make new information easy to find we have set up a "New Updates" section with a link to it right on the main page. In this new section you will find a list of all the new information placed on the website in the last few months. Other items on the site include a full list of upcoming educational programs and TRAC events, species spotlights, membership information, back and current issues of the newsletter and just about everything else you can imagine! Our website is available at

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

### **Coming to a State Park or Forest Near You**

Three Rivers Avian Center has been asked once again to provide our WV Birds of Prey programs in the State Parks and Forests this Summer! Spirit will be joining our other raptor ambassadors on the tour, enabling audience members to see part of West Virginia's most magnificent natural history heritage up close and learn more about wild bird and ecosystem stewardship in our highly interactive and fun programs. Check our schedule on our website for locations and times.

### **Looking to make to a difference?**

Don't forget the TRAC Endowment Fund! Created by Joyce and Randall Broyles in 2003, the endowment is already making a real difference here, enabling us to make long term plans for the Center as well as providing some immediate funding for smaller needs. The fund is managed by the Beckley Area Foundation and donations to it can be made in any amount.

To make a fully tax deductible donation to the Three Rivers Avian Center Endowment Fund, contact Dena Cushman or Susan Landis at the Beckley Area Foundation, 129 Main Street, Suite 203, Beckley, WV 25801, or call them at 304-253-3806. The Beckley Area Foundation's website is [www.beckleyareafoundation.com](http://www.beckleyareafoundation.com). Your donation will make a difference for many years to come. Thank you Joyce and Randall for having the fore sight to create this long lasting gift for West Virginia's birds!

## **A Musing on Eagles**

As we present our education programs around West Virginia we are now frequently asked a new and interesting question: what are the differences between balds and goldens - besides the feathers? Having lived now with both a bald and a golden eagle for months, we have been accumulating a list!

First there is the overall personality. The bald eagle is much more reticent and shy around humans, although around their own kind or even mixed flocks with goldens included they are often quite gregarious. The golden eagle is much more amenable to being around humans and is also happy to be near other birds of all sorts.

The bald eagle we have been working with and from other falconer and rehabilitator reports is much more easy to stress than a golden, who has a much more "laid back", "wait and see" attitude. Balds tend to nip at a handler, goldens almost never nip.

Both species are highly intelligent, on another level from the other raptors. The golden eagle is very actively interested in all that goes on around him whether he's hungry or not and is always scanning the area for something new. The bald eagle looks around, isn't hungry, so after a few minutes settles into his own thoughts. At first it would seem that he might be depressed, but it isn't so. He's just lazing around. Once he gets hungry the interest in the goings on around him increases just fine. Bald eagles have been known to laze around on their roost for 2 full days if they aren't hungry. It's difficult to get a golden to laze around for a couple of hours! Goldens are hoppy birds. Always checking out things, willing to walk or hop around to get a different or closer look. Balds are either flying or sitting, not much in-between.

Both can be vocal, although in a conversational or confrontational way versus a territorial call. The bald has a cacking call from the back of the throat with the mouth open that can be either quiet or quite loud when he's trying to get us to leave him alone and not make him get his daily treatments. He also has a honking sound when he's aggravated. Goldens have a real repertoire of sounds, many difficult to describe. The most common ones from Spirit include some whistling calls when he's interested

and excited about something, some squeaky begging type calls when he's hungry and some flute like calls when he's having a private, relaxed conversation with his handler.

Balds have stubby but strong feet, well equipped for catching their favorite foods of large fish, ducks, muskrats, rabbits and squirrels. Goldens have longer toes and also have a crushing grip, which well equips them for catching larger prey species such as small foxes and deer, geese and cranes as well as their most favorite prey: rabbits.

Golden eagles, although large, have a head similar in proportion to a red tailed hawk, although the beak is more highly arched. A bald eagle has a beak more similar to a vultures', although much more heavy in build. The lower legs of the golden eagle are feathered down to the toes. The bald eagle's lower legs are bare.

The overall bodies are different as well. The bald eagle is compact and strong (think of a football linebacker) in appearance, while the golden has a more linear shape, the strength showing in the massive shoulders (think of a soccer goalie). When you look at a golden eagle it is easy to see that they are members of the Buteo subfamily, which include red tailed and broad winged hawks. When looking at a bald eagle, it is harder to see the family resemblance, although the bald eagle is as much a Buteo as the golden.

The bald eagle was listed as Endangered on March 11, 1967, and was moved to Threatened status in the 1990's. Although there has been discussion of removing the bald eagle entirely from the Endangered Species List, current conservation measures are not sufficiently in place to support the population according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The golden eagle population is pretty stable, enabling falconers to capture a few individuals in selected western States and train them for falconry. More golden eagles are seen in the West than here in the East.

Any way you look at them, both species are amazing and wonderful creatures. It is a real honor to be able to work with them.



Wendy Perrone, TRAC Executive Director

**You can make a difference! Become a member and/or purchase any products on this page and you'll help the Center continue to care for West Virginia's wild birds!**

Memberships:

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Nick	Red Tailed Hawk
Harlan	Red Tailed Hawk-dark
Kendra	Red Shouldered Hawk
Twister	Barn Owl
Ginger	Long Eared Owl
Perry	Peregrine Falcon

**Special: Sponsor Spirit, the Golden Eagle just \$60.00 per year! Check here to sponsor \_\_\_**

**The General Store:**

"A Personal Pile of Tunes" by Ron Perrone. Acoustic 6 & 12 string guitar and vocals. Includes: Tenting Tonight, Black Jack Davey, Fair Beauty Bright, Howl Away Dog, Shawneetown, Timber, and more. **Price \$15.00**

"Backtrack" by Ron Perrone. Primarily original folk and traditional music, includes "Two Brothers", "King Coal", "John Henry", "Kimberly's Waltz" & others. **Price \$15.00**

TRAC Black short sleeved t- shirt with large grey ink stamp graphic of Great Horned Owl on the back, TRAC logo on front. 100% cotton, shirt made by Gildan Activewear. Sizes: Med, Large, X-large **Price: \$12.00**

TRAC Black long sleeved t- shirt with large grey ink stamp graphic of Great Horned Owl on the back, TRAC logo on front. 100% cotton, shirt made by Gildan Activewear. Sizes: Med, Large, X-large **Price: \$18.00**

TRAC short sleeved hunter green polo shirt, TRAC logo embroidered on front. 100% Cotton, shirt made by Cross Creek. Sizes: Med, Large, X-large **Price: \$25.00**

TRAC Raptor Poster: Raptors of the New River Gorge. Black background with 5 full color photos: Red Tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Great Horned Owl, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle. **Price: \$7.00**

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

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