



# The Raptor Chapter

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## Second Great Horned Owlet Released

**T**he second  
Great  
Horned  
Owlet of 2007 was  
released at a  
Raleigh county  
farm on September  
12<sup>th</sup>. She had been

found on June 5<sup>th</sup> near Mercer county along the WV state boarder lying beside the road. A full exam showed that other than being a little thin, the young fledgling had a broken front toe on the right foot. It is hard to know exactly how it happened, but from the wound on the top of the toe at the fracture site, we surmised that she may have encountered a vehicle antenna as she flew across the road.

Owls feet are different from other birds: they have two toes in the front and two in the back, compared to other bird's three in front and one in back. Despite having to amputate the bad front toe, she was able to fully compensate for the loss with the other 3 toes. She was released back to the wild fully able to hunt for and feed herself.

## October 6<sup>th</sup> Final Free Public Tour Day at TRAC for 2007

**J**ust a reminder, folks - the last Public Tour Day at Three Rivers Avian Center for 2007 is this coming Saturday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, from 1 - 5 pm.

Those of you who would like to see the facility and view our 12 educational raptors in their home space are encouraged to make the trip. Hawks, owls, falcons and a golden eagle will all be waiting to greet you. TRAC is located in the southern part of the New River Gorge, Summers County, just off Route 20 between Hinton and Sandstone. The facility is 8 miles from Interstate 64. Admission is free, but donations are very welcome & tax deductible.

The next season of Public Tour Days will begin next May, and run on the first Saturday from May - October from 1 - 5 pm. If you need directions, please feel free to call us at 304-466-4683.

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## Drought Effects

Spring came early this year. Mild weather and good rain cut Winter off in mid stride and it looked like the Summer was going to be a prosperous one for all of us forest dwellers. But Spring turned fickle on us with 2 late freezes and then Summer compounded the situation with scattered, but severe drought. For people everywhere, the chatter frequently turned to concerns about wells and gardens. But for the Raptors, the weather was playing a tough double whammy.

First, the early gentle Spring had provided an explosion of small prey species, which as a food source, ensured a prosperous nesting season and many baby owls and hawks. This year's raptor generation did well. The brief freezes affected them very little when they occurred. Birds sitting on the nest are well equipped to protect their young from the cold, as are rodents and rabbits.

But the freezes substantially affected the underpinning food chain for all these creatures. In many parts of the state, fruit and nut crops failed. Everything from blackberries, apples, and acorns just didn't happen. On our farm, all the trees had to put out a second set of leaves, and then after the second freeze, a third set of leaves. There was no energy left in them to set fruit.

In May and June we were overrun with mice, chipmunks, squirrels, and rabbits, but by mid Summer they were scarce. Driving around, we made a point of watching for ground hogs. Usually easy to spot along the road, days went by between sightings. This was also when TRAC started receiving what has become a steady stream of starving raptors. Mostly Red-tailed Hawks, these are otherwise healthy birds just not able to find food. It is only September and 2007 is already the 3<sup>rd</sup> worst year (out of 17) for starving raptors being turned in. As a proportion of all birds turned in for the year to date, it is already the worst.

Drought can effect small mammals in a couple of ways. First, it reduces their food supply. But it also affects the under story

vegetation that provides cover for small critters. There are big chunks of forest in Summers county where the under story is wilted away to nothing. Those areas where food resources still remain are attracting deer who accelerate the depletion of both food and cover for small mammals. The raptors depend on them are having a hard time.

As I write this, we are having a much needed rain storm. If the drought breaks, it will be interesting to see if the steady stream of starving raptors backs off. If it does, then they will have reached a balance with their recovering prey base. But if the current trend continues, however, it looks like it will be a long hard pull for rodents and raptors alike, all of whom are caught between the classic "rock" of scant resources and the "hard place" of the coming Winter.

Under the best of conditions, raptor mortality is high in the first year or two of life. The first Winter is always the hardest because quite a few raptors run out of the time it takes to learn the necessary skills to survive their first Winter. The first really cold snap always brings birds in to TRAC. But a mid Summer run like this has been disconcerting. It is a reminder of how incorrect it is to assume that life is easier on the predator than on the prey.

Which also reminds me, only a little off subject, of why a Peregrine restoration project like the one going on in the New River Gorge needs to be a multi-year effort. Something like 90% of all Peregrines perish before they reach breeding age. To establish a population, it will be necessary to keep releasing birds for a number of years simply to achieve enough survivors to begin nesting. Survival is the name of the game.

So, if you witness a swift and successful strike by a bird of prey this Fall, don't dismay at a life lost. Instead, give a cheer for the life saved. It is a rough and tumble world out there, and the ones who make it through, for both predator and prey alike, are the ones who were sharp enough to beat the odds that life deals to them. And they become the hope of next Spring. -Ron Perrone, TRAC Education Dir.



**Species Spotlight:**  
**Double Crested Cormorant**

**Scientific Name:** *Phalacrocorax auritus*

**Appearance:** stocky, compact body with large, slender webbed feet and a long slender neck, dark all over. Bill is yellow with dark areas on upper part, and a small hook at the end of an otherwise straight beak. Feathers are compact and tightly formed on the entire body, feathers are not coated in natural oils as in other waterbirds. Breeding plumage includes 2 small dark feather tufts on the back of the top of head. Feet are highly flexible. Sexes look alike. Eyes are adapted for both aerial as well as underwater environments. They are aggressive defenders of their nests, and are known for their tendency to bite with a vengeance when in captivity.

**Size:** Body averages 27 inches. Wingspan is around 50 inches. They weigh around 4 - 5 pounds, and can live to be up to 23 years old.

**Range:** throughout North America at least, and can be found either in fresh or salt water areas as long as small fish are plentiful.

**Food Preferences:** small fish make up the bulk of the diet, supplemented with mollusks, some crustaceans and reptiles

**Hunting Technique:** dives and pursues prey underwater by swimming in a torpedo-like

manner to depths of 5 - 25 feet below the surface. Frequently goes after schooling fish.

**Breeding & Habitat:** These birds can be found in a large variety of lakes, marshes, offshore islands and coastal estuaries. They usually overwinter in coastal habitats, but they can also use inland lakes, reservoirs and fish farms. Northern individual birds may migrate to warmer climates in August - November, some as far south as Belize. Double-crested cormorants are North America's most widespread cormorant, and can be found throughout most of the continent.

**Nesting:** nests are platform type, constructed of sticks, seaweed, and other drift material. Colony nesters. Nests can be built on the ground or to 150 feet up in a tree, but all nests in the colony will be built at the same height. Usually lined with softer materials. Both male and female build the nest together.

**Eggs:** average 3 - 4, one brood only per year. Older, more experienced birds tend to nest earlier than younger birds. Eggs are light blue to bluish-white, usually with some nest staining, about 2.4 inches long.

**Chicks:** Chicks hatch asynchronously and are brooded almost continually for the first 12 days, are able to maintain their own body temperature at 14 to 15 days. They fledge at 35 to 42 days.

**Status:** Originally headed for the national endangered species list in the 1970's due to DDT poisonings, their numbers have rebounded and they can now be found throughout North America's water ways, lakes and ponds. Across the US and Canada their numbers seem to be increasing, leading to some population control measures in the Great Lakes region.

**Notes:** At the beginning of September TRAC volunteers Linda and Melvin Goodpasture rescued a double-crested cormorant that had been trapped in a chain link fence in Wayne county. It had sustained fractures of the radius and ulna at the wrist and had also been predated while stuck in the fence. Sadly, we were unable to save it's life.



## 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!

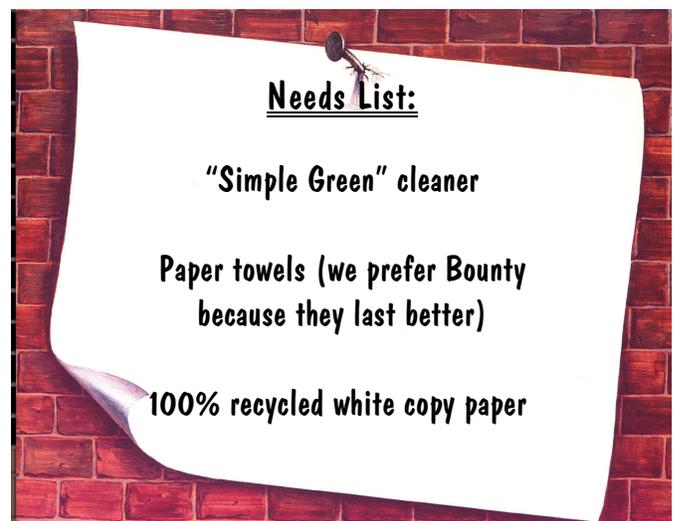
TRAC Staff Veterinarian: Dr Bill Streit	
All Creatures Veterinary Clinic	304-2-425-9944
Stafford Drive Plaza, Princeton	
<hr/>	
Animal Care Associates	304-344-2244
840 Oakwood Road, Charleston	
Beckley Veterinary Hospital	304-255-4159
215 Dry Hill Road, Charleston	
Cross Lanes Veterinary Hospital	304-776-4501
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	

### A few quick general notes:

⌘ Hummingbirds are still around, so remember to keep your feeders filled with clean nectar. A simple recipe is 1/4 cup sugar dissolved in 1 cup warm water - and remember not to add coloring to it. The hummingbirds can't digest the dye and it ends up staining their entire abdominal cavity. Research is showing that hummingbirds remember where feeders have been set out as they head south in the Fall and plan their routes accordingly. A good rule of thumb is to leave the feeders out up to 2 weeks past the last hummingbird sighting you have.

⌘ TRAC has received a very unusual red tailed hawk from the Charleston area: it's about half-way to being an albino. It is just getting its' red tail, so it will be two years old in Spring. It is healing up from a prey bite on it's foot that has severed the tendon which operates the middle toe. We are hoping to avoid surgery, but even if we do have to go that route we still expect to be able to release it back to the wild. Visit our website for pictures of this unusual bird: it will be on the photo scrapbook main page: [www.tracwv.org/scrap.html](http://www.tracwv.org/scrap.html)

⌘ The 6 satellite transmitters are providing very interesting data on the movements of the young peregrines from the New River Gorge Peregrine Restoration Project. Check out the latest maps of their movements at our website: [www.tracwv.org](http://www.tracwv.org).





## Two New Pairs of Binoculars!

**R**andy & Gloria Urian, owners of Wild Birds Unlimited in Barboursville, WV and the Vortex Optics Company teamed up to donate a Vortex 10x50 "Vulture" and a Vortex 10x50 "Razor". "Three Rivers Avian Center is a valuable resource in West Virginia," said Randy Urian. "We believe in their mission and are so pleased to assist them with new binoculars. It is our hope that these can be used by TRAC to help with their important research for many years."

The 10 x 50 Vulture is a good all around pair of short/medium range optics. They have a very clear, crisp image and are comfortable for all-day use and general birding.

But the 10x50 Razors are truly a high end product. They present an image that is bright, clear, and uncolored. They even transmit enough light well enough to be useful at night if there's so much as a half moon in the sky. I have become addicted to them. I like to joke about how the Razors have a flaw, though. Out at the cliffs I found myself having trouble seeing into nooks and crannies only to discover that I was scanning much farther out than I had ever dared with my old bins. That's the kind of "problem" I want. They increased my Peregrine I. D. Range by over 50% at the same power as my old pair. At closer ranges, I am able to grab the leg band colors way faster. This is extremely important.

Thanks to the Urians of Wild Birds Unlimited and Vortex Optics for their help! -RP



**P**atient intakes so far this year have been sporadic, with birds being turned in in small bursts here and there. We've taken in over 30 species so far, with Barred Owls and Red Tailed Hawks leading the list in individuals turned in. Collisions with vehicles and starvation are leading the causes for admission. Lately it seems that we are getting in a majority of first year birds, usually red tailed hawks, that have not done well in the hunting department and are starving to death. Giving them some R & R time with good quality food is at least giving them a second chance. We suspect strongly that the drought conditions combined with a decline in this year's prey food such as fruits, berries and seeds are contributing factors.

**N**ow is a good time to make sure your suet and bird seed feeders are filled to help the songbirds and woodpeckers put on fat for the upcoming winter. When in doubt, black sunflower seeds are always popular!

**T**he flight barn is awaiting final funding for the "racetrack" that will finish the last part of the building. A grant request is pending approval and we hope that we will be able to be putting the finishing touches on the completed building before the snow flies. Anyone interested in volunteering to help with the construction process, please contact us at 304-466-4683 or via e-mail at [trac@tracwv.org](mailto:trac@tracwv.org). We hope to be working on it November through December if the funds come through. Most of the work requires only basic skills.

# 2007 Birds of Prey Photography Workshop

**Saturday October 13, 2007**

**9 am to 4 pm**

**Half or Full Day sessions available**

**A**mateur and professional photographers are invited to the **2007 Birds of Prey Photo Workshop** at the Three Rivers Avian Center ("TRAC") in Brooks, WV.

The workshop will be held on **Saturday, October 13, 2007 from 9 am - 4 pm.** Photographer Steven Wayne Rotsch, TRAC co-directors Wendy and Ron Perrone and TRAC volunteers give amateur and professional photographers alike the opportunity to capture images of many of West Virginia's raptors in natural settings as well as give numerous natural history notes and insights that make this event truly special. "Cheat sheet" handouts, which include a representational photo of the raptor, that individual bird's species and it's personal name, will be available for all participants for later photograph identification.

Twelve birds of prey will be modeling for the cameras, including a male fifth year Golden Eagle, a female Peregrine Falcon, male and female American Kestrels, a Barn Owl, a dark morph male Red Tailed Hawk, a lighter, more common morph female Red-tailed Hawk, a Broad-winged Hawk, a Red-shouldered hawk, a Long Eared Owl, a Barred Owl, and a Great Horned Owl. All raptors will be available during the both the morning and afternoon sessions, and since these birds are used to being around people they are excellent photography subjects. Background settings will change between the morning and afternoon sessions; all birds will be perched according to habitats typical of their species.

Interested individuals may pick up technical tips in Adobe Photoshop CS2 during the informal one-on-one sessions with instructors, as well as framing and other professional tips as the day progresses.

Very special to this event, TRAC will also be able to release a recently healed red

tailed hawk back to the wild. Photographers will be able to photograph her flying off to freedom over the New River Gorge.

Participants should bring a camera, flash, a telephoto lens, extra batteries and lots of film or memory cards. If you have a monopod, participants in previous workshops have found the device useful. Comfortable shoes and outdoors appropriate clothing are also recommended. All photograph sessions will be outdoors.

In one day, participants will take photographs of these raptors that it would take a lifetime to duplicate in the wild, if at all. In case of rain, shelters will be made available to photograph from.

Participants may sign up for the full-day 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. session (which includes lunch) for \$100, or a half day session for \$50.00. The morning session runs from 9 a.m. to noon, the afternoon session runs from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Please indicate your preference when you register.

To sign up or for more information, log onto [www.stevenrotsch.com](http://www.stevenrotsch.com). There you can find more photo workshop information and a downloadable registration form. (You can also see some of the tremendous photographs taken at previous workshops at TRAC!)

If you prefer to contact Steve Rotsch by phone, his numbers are **304-541-7574 or 304-344-1395**, web site [www.stevenrotsch.com](http://www.stevenrotsch.com) or you can email him at [swrkab@aol.com](mailto:swrkab@aol.com).

Participants can prepay for their registration with credit cards or Paypal from the Workshop page on Steve's website [www.stevenrotsch.com](http://www.stevenrotsch.com).

Directions to Three Rivers Avian Center (TRAC) are available from Steve Rotsch's web page listed above, or you may call TRAC at 304-466-4683 for verbal directions from your location. TRAC is located between Hinton and Sandstone in Summers County, which is in the southern end of the New River Gorge National River in West Virginia.

**To contact TRAC, call (304) 466 - 4683, e-mail us at [trac@tracwv.org](mailto:trac@tracwv.org) or visit the web page at [www.tracwv.org](http://www.tracwv.org)**

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) which will be on-line in a few weeks. 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

*Drought conditions and migration related intakes are increasing. Rising fuel and utility costs are taking a big bite out of our normal budget. Your donation will help us defray the costs associated with providing care to the over 95 different bird species for whom we provide veterinary and rehabilitative assistance. Please consider an extra gift if your membership is up to date - your support will really help!*

## Feathered Friend Sponsorships

Spirit	Golden Eagle	\$60
Apex	American Kestrel (male)	\$30
Ayla	American Kestrel (female)	\$30
Perry	Peregrine Falcon	\$30
Robbie	Barred Owl	\$30
Twister	Barn Owl	\$30
Ginger	Long Eared Owl	\$30
Casey	Eastern Screech Owl -red	\$30
Clara	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

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

**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.*

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