



# The Raptor Chapter

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## When is a hawk not a hawk?

The phone rang, a blustery, worried gentleman was on the line. "I'm a security guard and I just got told that there is a red tailed hawk with a broken wing on the ground at our facility". After telling him how to safely capture it, we agreed that he would take it to one of our nearby Hospice Veterinarians. (A full list of these veterinarians, who donate their time and facilities to help us care for injured wild birds around the State, is located on our website: [www.tracwv.org](http://www.tracwv.org)).

Our transport volunteer Alisha Segars (a former TRAC intern) arrived at the veterinarian's to pick up the bird and was surprised to find it was in a 5 gallon bucket with the plastic lid ajar. A lady in the room pointed to the bucket and said "They just brought it in. We don't think it's a red tailed hawk - more like a falcon." Either way, red tail or falcon, having it stay in a 5 gallon bucket with the lid ajar was very odd - normally the bucket would be overturned and the bird out of it in no time whatsoever. Alisha carefully peeped inside. Not a red tail. Not a falcon. It was a nighthawk, and the wing was indeed badly broken from a collision of some kind. Alisha carefully brought the bird to TRAC.

Common nighthawks are migrating through West Virginia right now and we've had several turned in for care. They are a member



of the family of birds called "nighthawks", insect eating birds that hunt on the wing at dusk and dawn. Their erratic, bat-like flight as they hunt has earned

them the nickname "bull-bat". The tip of their tiny beak is curved downwards, which misleads many into classifying this bird as a hawk. The beak is deceptive. Despite its diminutive beak size, the mouth itself opens up to be quite large, resembling a baseball catcher's mitt. It helps them capture small insects in flight.

In one respect however, calling the bird a hawk is not so far off. "To hawk" is a verb that means "to fly after prey", which exactly describes how nighthawks feed on insects; add to that they are most frequently seen at dusk, and the first part of the nighthawk name makes sense too. The "common" part of the name can be inaccurate though, depending on where you look. Although they can be found throughout North America from Spring through Fall, populations in Canada have fallen so far that they are now on Canada's threatened species list. They are also in decline in Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Delaware. West Virginia's nighthawk population status is uncertain.

# Crossbow of the Sky

We went out to the Peregrine Restoration hack site last week. There weren't any Peregrines there, of course. The birds we had cared for and released this Summer were long gone. Like all birds that migrate, the instinct to push on is strong as the days shorten. I mention this because I have been thinking about Peregrine personalities lately. How they seem to possess an intensity unique to their species. When people who handle these birds try to explain this, we often use words like "insane", "fearless", "courageous", "arrogant", etcetera, but these references miss the point.

The ecological niche of the Peregrine is extreme. They have been placed on a trajectory that pushes the evolutionary boundary of what a hunting bird can do. They are not big raptors and their feet, though proportionally large, are not equipped with the heavy weaponry that many species of hawks and owls possess. In fact, Peregrines are often preyed upon by Great Horned Owls. Unlike generalists like the Red-tailed Hawks who hunt a wide variety of prey, Peregrines specialize in hunting birds, supplementing with rodents and other mammals and snakes. To catch birds, one needs speed. Pursuing their prey in the air requires agility, tenacity, quick observational skills, instantaneous reflexes, and luck. Absent these, they die. In fact, 90% of Peregrines are dead before they ever get a chance to breed. Some die from predation, but most die from collisions and starvation.

Starting sometime in the late Miocene, Peregrines emerged as a species. Generation after generation for 11 million years they have been sharpened on the grindstone of a high risk lifestyle until the Peregrines that we see today are as keen as razors. Their speed is their blessing and their curse. While young birds may have the instinct to take to the air, the skill to make it work for them is learned. They must learn to fly, land, hunt, and avoid

predation all at the same time, no small trick. They learn from their parents and from their siblings and if they don't get it in the first few weeks, they're finished. At the speeds which Peregrines can attain (263 mph in one study), second chances are not guaranteed.

Impatience starts early with baby Peregrines. They are small and defenseless for only a few weeks. After that, their need for food manifests itself as a screaming quick temper. Fledglings have been known to "bind" with their parents or siblings when the food arrives at the nest. The results can be fatal. Sometimes the parents resort to low altitude food drops to avoid injury. Patience as a virtue has apparently been weeded out long ago.

Perry, TRAC's education Peregrine, often gets impatient with me. Her mind is like a Ferrari compared to mine. She can see 5 times farther and make sense of what she sees twice as fast. Before her



*Perry, TRAC's Peregrine Falcon  
courtesy of Sharyn Ogden*

crippling shoulder injury, she could fly for hours on migration and pull 25 G's to catch dinner. She has powers of observation, concentration, and sheer will that make me sometimes appear to her as a plodding creature at best. On the glove she'll sit paddling her wings as I hook up her swivel and leash. She seems to be saying, "Come on, come on, you are so slow!" Sometimes she blows her top in frustration. Sometimes she decides she has better things to do with her time and tries to leave. I know she rather likes me, but patience with me or anything else doesn't seem to come naturally to her.

Call them crazy or call them noble, they are truly gifted, complex, and worthy of the title "Crossbow of the Sky".

*-Ron Perrone, TRAC Education Director*



## 2011 New River Gorge Peregrine Falcon Restoration Project

This was the sixth year for the Project and the third year at Grandview Park near Beckley. Winter-long camera surveillance had turned up no threats to the site and attempts to locate adult Peregrines with on-foot surveys and recordings also failed to find adults, but we knew from the previous year's experience that they could still be in the area. Finding any local adults was important because if adults were nesting nearby they would be intolerant of any new peregrines in their territory. This possibility became realized almost immediately after we placed our first chicks in the hack boxes. Attracted by the noise of the chicks, 1 and sometimes 2 adult peregrines began occasional "flybys" in the airspace in front of the hack box. Their behavior toward the chicks was nonaggressive, so it was decided to continue to release the youngsters as originally scheduled.

Altogether, 22 nestling peregrines were released into the New River Gorge this season. 20 of those birds came in as 25 - 32 day old chicks, were raised in the hack boxes on the cliffs and then released when they were approximately 45 days old. At the beginning of July we released 2 additional fledglings that had been in rehabilitation at a New Jersey facility, but since they were already older than 45 days and were ready to fly when we received them, their data is not included in the season's Project statistics.

Of the 20 young peregrines in the hacking program, 13 were observed remaining in the area for a minimum of 14 days and are

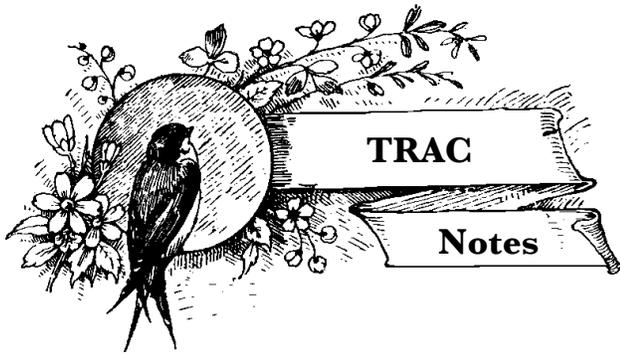
considered successfully released. While we did not observe the adults harming any of the fledglings, they did occasionally harass them, mostly by chasing them into the trees along the cliff-line and keeping them from flying out in the Gorge. This disruption could be considered as a contributing factor to having 7 peregrines that did not stay in the hacking area for the critical 2 week period following their release.

This Summer's work leads us to the conclusion that since adult peregrines have been observed at Grandview for 2 years running, there is a chance that they may nest somewhere in the vicinity next year. While future releases from a new hack site elsewhere may be possible, the mounting evidence leads us to consider including a stronger focus on locating active nests in the scope of the Project.



One of the young peregrines from this Season's hack ran into trouble soon after she left the hacksite in July. Pink-over-purple (named for her unique color combination of Project leg bands) is a female originally from the Elkins Shack nest in the Chesapeake Bay of Virginia. She was part of the first group released from the hack boxes at Grandview on June 26<sup>th</sup> and was last seen on site there on July 14<sup>th</sup>.

On July 26<sup>th</sup> she was found starving in a farmer's yard in Monroe County. Exam showed that along with her starvation, she had both trichomoniasis (a protozoan infection) and aspergillosis (a fungal infection of the airways and lungs). Trichomoniasis creates cankers in the throat and windpipe, making eating difficult. We were able to take care of that infection with a few days of treatments and she's been eating very well ever since. We are still working on the aspergillosis but are seeing progress there too. She has her stamina back and her peregrine attitude and vocals are good. If she continues to progress at this rate we hope to re-release her at the end of October at the hacksite at Grandview.



**T**he Eagle Reward Fund at TRAC has now reached \$2,680! The Fund was established in March to reward the person(s) who gives information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person(s) who have been shooting eagles in West Virginia. We started it in response to the shooting of an adult bald eagle in the Bluestone Wildlife Management Area this past Thanksgiving, but since the beginning of 2011 there have been an additional 4 bald eagles shot as well. All were adults, with white head and tail clearly visible. Contributions to the Eagle Reward Fund are tax deductible and are held in a restricted account at TRAC. If you would like to make a contribution, donations of any size are welcome, just be sure to let TRAC know on your donation that it's for the Eagle Reward Fund.

**W**est Virginia's State Parks celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> Annual VIPP picnic at Blennerhassett Island Historical State Park September 17th. "VIPP" stands for Very Important Parks Person, a unique visitation program created in 1986 to recognize 'friends' of West Virginia State Parks. These folks come from all over West Virginia and beyond. Three Rivers Avian Center was a featured presenter for the event, and we were given a lovely venue under some old black walnut trees. The day was a perfect one: sunny, not too hot, and the grounds of the Island combined with the costumed reenactors gave a feeling of stepping back into a more relaxed age. To top the day off, a mature bald eagle flew overhead just prior to our program.

**R**aptor 1, the van of Three Rivers Avian Center, has a new look! In mid-August we traded in the very tired and very worn out maroon 2003 Chevy Astro mini-van for a full sized navy blue 2011 Chevy Express 1500 Passenger van. It has all wheel drive, On-Star tracking, and although not fancy inside it has the most comfortable ride the entire TRAC crew has ever had. The generous space in the rear allows us to place cages in a much better configuration for air flow and allows the birds a better view out the windows. We've noticed that they are much calmer in the van now, even the cage doors don't rattle! This new van has a bit better mileage than the Astro did and a much better turning radius, as well as better stability and traction. We've already put 3,500 miles on it in less than 6 weeks.

**E**verything the Center accomplishes is made possible by the generosity and support we receive from individuals, groups, businesses and foundations. This thoughtfulness is vital to our ability to serve the needs of WV wild birds and the ecosystems they live in. We thank the following grantors for believing in and supporting the mission of Three Rivers Avian Center: The Acker Foundation, the One Foundation, and the H.P. & Anne S. Hunnicutt Foundation.

**W**e would like to say a special thank you to the Boy Scouts of Week 4 SummitCorps at The Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve. These Order of the Arrow Scouts raised \$2,000 for TRAC in a patch auction at the end of July. We used the funds to help with the down-payment on our new van.

**T**he Flight Barn continues to slowly progress towards completion. All the wire mesh is on the outer flyway, including on the roof along the sides. We are putting up the sheathing boards now so that we can put the white Tuflex roofing on the ends. We estimate that we have about 30 hours of work left to complete the structure - we're so close!!! It has become a running joke though that if we need rain all we have to do is schedule a flight barn work day, but we're hoping to have the building done by Thanksgiving. Watch the Three Rivers Avian Center's Facebook page for details.

**Y**ou may have noticed that the TRAC Blog suddenly disappeared from the TRAC website ([www.tracwv.org](http://www.tracwv.org)) a few months ago. During an upgrade to our website a vital part of the Blog file was destroyed, taking all discussions, posts, pictures, etc with it. We've attempted to fix the file but it's too badly damaged to do anything else except start over completely.

In the meantime, the Three Rivers Avian Center Facebook page has more than filled the void. It is easily accessible, anyone can post pictures or comments to it and it has been receiving much more traffic than the Blog did. With this in mind, we have decided to retire the TRAC Blog permanently and use our Facebook page for updates, discussions, photos and such.

We have heard concern expressed from some individuals who do not want to become "part of the Facebook community" but still want to see what TRAC is up to on a regular basis. You do not have to join Facebook to read our Facebook page. It is open to everyone. The only time you need to be a Facebook member is if you decide to leave a comment or message on our Facebook page.

Getting to our Facebook page is very easy. You can go to the TRAC website and click on the link on our front page, or go to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and type in "Three Rivers Avian Center" in the search box at the top of the page.

**T**he annual Migration Celebration was held at Little Beaver State Park on May 14<sup>th</sup>. Despite cool temperatures and a few light rain showers, we had a record attendance of 1,800 people, from little babies up to grandparents.

The Migration Celebration is a family oriented festival hosted by Three Rivers Avian Center in honor of International Migratory Bird Day, focusing on West Virginia's wild birds and natural heritage. It is held on the second Saturday of May each year. Exhibitors include the WV Division of Natural Resources' Wildlife Diversity Program, the National Park Service, the WV Department of Agriculture's Insect Survey and the Raleigh County Solid Waste Authority's Recycling Program. Activities for both kids and adults are scheduled all day, including bird walks with Bev Delidow, bug hunts, nature walks, storytelling with Granny Sue, a 2 hour photo workshop with Steve Rotsch featuring live raptors from Three Rivers Avian Center, and so much more.

The Migration Celebration is free and open to the public, so mark your calendars for May 12, 2012!

**A** mature bald eagle was found floating in the Greenbrier River near Seebert (Pocahontas county) on September 8<sup>th</sup>. Greenbrier River Trail workers waded in and rescued him, coordinated with WV DNR and got the bird to us. Exam and x-rays showed him VERY thin with a broken left shoulder and broken right femur, both were at least 6 week old collision injuries (not gunshot). The fractures cannot be repaired due to the age of the injuries, the formation of the bone callous and the way the bones broke originally. He is able to stand and use the right foot, but the leg will always be at least 2 cm shorter than the other. He will never be able to fly again. HOWEVER, despite his injuries, we expect to be able to bring him back up to normal body weight and will be coordinating with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to locate a facility where he can live as a display bird for the rest of his life.

## Rebecca Pollard

### TRAC's 2011 Summer Intern

*Photo courtesy of Sharyn Ogden*

**M**y first plans for the summer were to live far from home and intern with animals such as whales and sea lions. I am a double major in Animal Science and Biology with a minor in Chemistry and needed an internship to further my resume for vet school. However, these plans were ended when I had to have knee surgery. For a while this seemed devastating and I was quite discouraged, but I began to think of things I could do at home along with my physical therapy, which led me to Three Rivers Avian Center.

I have grown up with what I call "bird nerd" parents; they have competed in The World Series of Birding and my father heads the annual New River Birding and Nature Festival and the Hummingbird Festival. I have always known about birds and even participated in winter bird counts and the festivals; however, for most of my life this has been very much so "un-cool". I never wanted to join the "bird-nerd-herd"! Luckily, as I have grown I have begun to better appreciate and admire all aspects of wildlife and now with the help of TRAC I can say that I have joined the bird-nerd-herd (and am proud of it)!

My internship with TRAC started in mid-May. I was immediately introduced to the art of cage cleaning. This is when I learned that copper scrubbers are my best friend. After a few days of cage cleaning TRAC hosted a photo workshop and I learned that when around birds, shampoo is an absolute must -Thomas the Eastern Screech Owl strategically projected droppings into my pony-tail.

Twister, the resident imprinted Barn Owl, was the beginning of my falling in love with birds. Not only is he a magnificent sight, but he has a personality! I never thought birds would have personalities, which is what draws me to animals in the first place; however, each bird I came in contact with at TRAC had individual behaviors just like mammals. With Twister I learned the hard way and spent my summer desperately trying to out-smart



him as he defended his territory; he really enjoyed landing on me. The hardest part of working with birds is reading their emotions. Being able to look at a raptor and know what it is thinking is quite different from reading a mammal. Another disadvantage is that raptors have hunted mammals for years; therefore the raptor knows what I am thinking way before I know what it is thinking.

Another highlight of this internship was the Peregrine Falcon Restoration Project. This project enabled me to sharpen my research skills while participating in an amazing project. Not to mention watching NASCAR in the sky is always a fun way to start the day. It is absolutely incredible to watch peregrine falcons maneuver through the air space.

I never imagined that working with birds could be so much fun. Unfortunately, though, my summer also included heartbreak. When you work with a bird day after day you develop a special connection and when they do not survive the world seems to end. This taught me two things. First, the rehabilitation of wild birds is the most difficult since an injured bird has lost all of its abilities to survive. Second, you must hang on to success stories and remember what it feels like to release a bird into the wild. This, I may add, is one of the best feelings in the world.

Thank you Three Rivers Avian for such an incredible summer. I now have many new skills and experiences that will help me to succeed in whatever I choose. I know that as my upcoming 21-credit hour semester begins I will be wishing for bird droppings in my hair and a copper scrubber in my hand. I cannot thank you enough.

**B**ecome 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. 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. 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+
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### Feathered Friend Sponsorships

Regis	Bald Eagle	\$60
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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
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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!**

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*We are working to reduce our carbon footprint, conserve TRAC resources, and save precious funds by using e-mail instead of the US Postal Service as much as possible. If you provide us with your e-mail address, we will use it to acknowledge donations and to send important notices once in a while (we promise not to cram your inbox!). TRAC has a long-standing policy of not selling or sharing member's addresses or other contact data, so your information is safe with us.*

**Your support is vital to our ability to continue caring for wild birds. Thank you!**

**We are often asked what "in-kind" items we need donated to the cause. These things are always needed: Paper towels Simple Green cleaner Odoban Stamps Chore Boy Copper Scrubbers And wild bird seed -high quality mixes containing lots of black sunflower seeds, fruits and nuts are best since we can feed it to more species.**

Keeping in touch with TRAC on-line is easy. Our website is [www.tracwv.org](http://www.tracwv.org), we're on Twitter (@TRACWV) and on Facebook (Three Rivers Avian Center). Or you can e-mail us! [trac@tracwv.org](mailto:trac@tracwv.org)

## **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 & will help advance the work of Three Rivers Avian Center.*

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Evelyn Bradley & Fred Gilkey  
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James & Mona Wiseman  
Charles & Beverly Wright  
Andrew & Janet Zettle

*In memory of Robert Tolliver*

*(Your name could be here.....)*

### **A Special Thank You to:**

**The Acker Foundation**

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

**The One Foundation**



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