



# The Orange County Bird of Prey Center

## RAPTORS OF ORANGE COUNTY

### What is a Raptor?

The word raptor comes from the Latin word 'rapere,' which means to seize. A raptor (bird of prey) is any one of a group of wild, carnivorous birds that tend to be either diurnal (active during daylight hours) or nocturnal (active at dusk and later). Diurnal raptors include hawks, eagles, kites, falcons, and vultures, while nocturnal raptors consist of owls.

A raptor's identifying features include a hooked upper beak for killing and tearing prey, strong grasping feet with sharp talons, and binocular vision that provides

depth perception during hunting. Raptors tend to display sexual dimorphism, which means that two sexes of the same species can exhibit marked differences in size, coloring, and markings. For example, female raptors are typically larger than their male counterparts.

In Orange County there is an abundance of raptors, if you know what to look for. We are lucky enough to have examples of hawks, falcons, owls, eagles, and more.

With the information provided here, you should begin to notice them all around you.

## EAGLES



**Bald Eagles**, the national symbol of the United States, were on the brink of disappearing several decades ago due to pesticides such as DDT and habitat loss. With conservation efforts, the Bald Eagle has made a great comeback. In Orange County, Bald Eagles are seen around bodies of water where they prey on fish. They are also known for scavenging. Juveniles are nearly all brown, with some white molting. They reach adulthood (white head and tail and bright yellow beak) at about five years old.

*Eagles look very similar to Buteo Hawks (see next page), but there are some key differences. Eagles are much larger than most Buteos. Their deep, broad wings are like a Buteo, but their last few primary feathers splay out at the end of their wings like fingers*



**Golden Eagles** are the second heaviest eagle in North America. After spending five years in their juvenile plumage, which is brown with large white patches under their wings and tail, they molt into their adult plumage. This adult plumage is where they get their name, as they become dark brown overall, but the back of the neck develops a beautiful golden sheen. They make a variety of sounds, including whistles, and a weak, high pitched "whip" or "wonk." These large birds can be spotted in the wide open hilly areas they use when hunting. Their main prey is mammals, such as rabbits and ground squirrels, but they've been reported killing bobcats and even bighorn sheep.

The Orange County Bird of Prey Center

www.ocbpc.org (949) 837-0786 25422 Trabuco Rd., Lake Forest, CA 92630

# HAWKS

In Orange County there are two groups of hawks: the Accipiters and the Buteos. Accipiters prey on other birds, have shorter, rounder wings, are smaller, much quicker, and better at maneuvering through tiny spaces. Buteos have deep broad wings for soaring, are larger, hunt mammals, and have a "sit and wait" style of hunting



**Cooper's Hawks** are Accipiters, and are known as a "backyard bird." If you have a bird feeder outside and keep noticing your birds going missing, it's probably because you've set up the perfect hunting ground for these raptors. If you're really lucky, you might get to see one of these bird eaters in action through your window. They are lightning quick! Juveniles of this species are brown with a streaky brown and white underside and yellow eyes, while

adults have a grey back, orange-red ("rufous") barred undersides and red eyes.



**Sharp-Shinned Hawks** are Accipiters and look like miniature versions of Cooper's Hawks. This is a common evolutionary trend: developing similarities to a larger, more frightening predator as a defense mechanism. When trying to determine whether you have a Cooper's or a Sharp-Shinned in your backyard, look at the head and tail. A Cooper's hawk has a blocky head and a rounded tail, while a Sharp-Shinned

hawk has a much rounder head and a straight-edged tail.



**Red-shouldered Hawks** are Buteos, even though their hunting style and size are similar to Accipiters. Because they tend to hunt birds as opposed to mammals, red-shouldered hawks have surprisingly small feet for their size. Juveniles are mostly brown with a "buffy" underside and heavy streaking, while adults become very orange in color and develop a checkered black and white pattern on the undersides of their

wings. These birds are not widespread across the United States, but are often seen in Orange County.

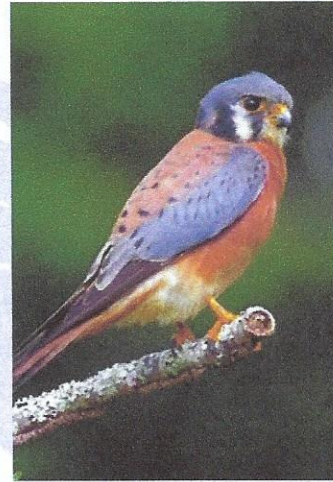


**Red-tailed Hawks** are by far the most common and well-known Buteos in North America. Their distinctive "kee-eeee-arr" call is often heard in movies, dubbed in for eagles, whose own call is far less majestic. Red-tailed hawks, unsurprisingly, earn their names from the red tail they develop after their first year. As juveniles, they're brown with a white chest and a brown, barred tail. As adults, their chests usually change to rufous, their eyes generally

darken, and they develop their signature red tail. Found in a wide variety of colors (called "morphs"), these birds are often spotted perched on light poles on the freeway or soaring over open land.

# FALCONS

There is a wide variety of falcons ranging from three pounds all the way down to about three ounces right here in Orange County. Falcons are raptors with long, pointed wings for diving at high speeds, and they have notched beaks. This notch is called the "tomial tooth" and is used by falcons to dispatch prey by snapping their necks. Falcons generally hunt by diving onto prey from above, but they can also use tactics like pursuit to catch birds.



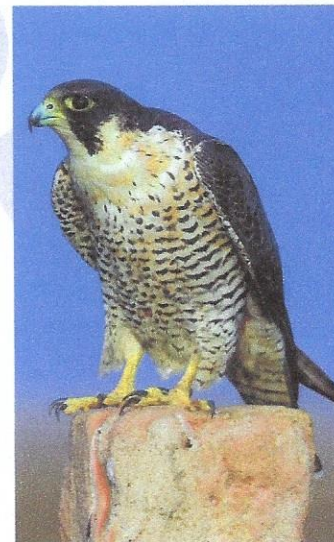
**American Kestrels** are the smallest raptor in North America. They're also one of the most sexually dimorphic raptors in the world. Most raptors show some level of sexual dimorphism, which is the difference between males and females, but it is usually only in size. American Kestrels, however, are unique in that the males have blue-grey wings, a spotted chest, and a reddish tail with a white tip. Females, on the other hand, have brown wings, a "dashed" chest, and a barred brown tail. A bit hard to spot since they're smaller than a dove, they can often be seen in large

open fields, hovering above the grass searching for insects.



**Merlins** are the second smallest of the falcons. Like the American Kestrel, they show some level of sexual dimorphism, though it is a bit more difficult to detect. In North America they come in three different morphs: Taiga, Prairie, and Black. Look for heavy streaking and tail bands, as nearly all Merlins will have them. Their colors range from near black to brown to slate-grey. These birds are tenacious hunters and won't let

a little thing like size stop them from going after their lunch.



**Peregrines** have come back from near extinction and are considered the fastest animal alive, with dives clocked at up to 240 mph. These dives are called "stoops" and are used to hit prey in mid-air. Stiff feathers and a teardrop body shape allow them to achieve these remarkably high speeds. Adults and juveniles both possess a marking called a "malar stripe," which is below their eye and reduces glare, similar to eye-black for athletes. Adults are dark grey on the back with a white underside and very fine black barring on the sides.

Juveniles are dark brown with a buffy, streaked underside.

# OWLS

Owls appear worldwide as symbols of wisdom, prophecy, wealth, and even death. Owls, in general, are split into two families—Strigidae or “true” owls, and Tytonidae, Barn Owl. Owls are nocturnal, have great vision, and feature excellent hearing that is achieved with a set of feathers called a “facial disc” that channels sound to their ears. Owls possess the ability of “silent flight,” which is accomplished with soft, serrated feathers that interlock, producing no noise when they fly. Many owls also have feathered legs and toes, which muffles the sound they make when they hunt.



**Barn Owls** are very pale and almost all white underneath, though some can be a dark cinnamon color. Barn owls have a very well defined heart-shaped facial disc which lets them pinpoint a mouse even in pitch blackness. Their eyes are small and dark, and their wings are very large compared to their body. They hunt by slowly moving over open fields and snatching up insects and rodents.



**Burrowing Owls** Not only do these owls burrow, they can actually dig their burrows themselves (in habit, they will also steal burrows from prairie dogs and tortoises). They are diurnal (active during the day), and gregarious (they live in groups). They have long, sparsely feathered legs compared to other owls. They have a barred chest and belly, a white eyebrow and throat, and are overall brown in color with paler brown spotting.



they make a “bouncing ball” hoot, consisting of a series of short, whistled hoots.

**Western Screech Owls** are small because they are cavity nesters. Their coloration is perfect camouflage, so they are difficult to find. They come in two colors, red and grey, and they blend in perfectly with trees, particularly oaks. They perform a behavior called “branching” where they stretch themselves out so they look long and thin, like a branch, which helps to avoid predators. Surprisingly, the Western Screech Owl’s name is a misnomer. They don’t screech. Instead



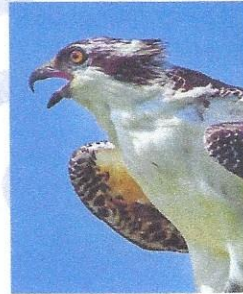
**Great Horned Owls** have the classic owl hoot. One of the larger owls in North America. The “horns” are actually tufts of feathers called plumicorns. Great Horned owls are a mottled grey and reddish orange color, with a white throat, and big yellow eyes. A top predator, the Great Horned Owl is large enough to take down rabbits and skunks, but they’ve also been known to kill other raptors including other Great Horned Owls, though they mainly prey on rodents.

# OTHER

Some birds of prey don’t really fit into a neat, broad category. These include the Northern Harrier, which looks rather owl-like, the Osprey, which hunts around water, the Turkey Vulture which feeds on dead animals (carrion), and the White-tailed Kite, a beautiful and mysterious white ghost of a bird.



**Northern Harriers**, also known as “Marsh” Harriers, often live in marshes. They possess a facial disc like an owl, and use hearing to pinpoint mammals and amphibians while hunting. Northern Harriers also show sexual dichromatism, which means that the males and females are different colors. Males are grey on the back and white below, while females are brown on the back and white below. Juveniles look similar to females but instead of a white stomach, theirs is buff in color. All Harriers have a distinctive white “rump,” a patch of white feathers above their tail.



**Osprey** may be confused with eagles, but they are very different. They have developed barbs on their feet, as well as the ability to switch the alignment of their toes. Most hawks have three toes in front and one in the back, while owls have two in front and two in back. Osprey can rotate one of their toes to have either alignment. In combination with the barbs, this makes it much easier to hold onto slippery fish. Osprey like to fish in shallower water, and take well to nesting in manmade platforms. The

Osprey is a very distinctive bird in both behavior and look. They’re mostly brown on their backs and white on the bottom, with a characteristic dark broad stripe across the eye.



**Turkey Vultures** are nature’s clean-up crew, and play a vital role in Orange County’s ecosystem. They fly on thermals (updrafts of warm air) and soar around all day searching for carrion. Because vultures don’t see very well, they depend upon a keen sense of smell to locate carrion. Turkey Vultures are very dark brown with grey flight feathers on their wings, a bald red head, and a white-tipped beak. From a distance, if you can’t tell whether you’re looking at a vulture or

a hawk in flight, look closely at the wings. Vultures hold their wings in a slight “V” shape, and they also wobble a lot more, “spilling air” as they try to soar as slowly as possible in search of food.



**White-tailed Kites** are ghostly white. Adults have black shoulders, grey wings, and red eyes. They’re found in large, open areas, preferring marshes and grasslands where they’ll hunt small mammals, birds, reptiles, and insects. Watching them hunt is quite the spectacle. They hover, called “kiting,” above the ground, then drop onto their prey. Finding kites can be difficult in Orange County, as habitat loss has reduced their populations significantly.

# HOW YOU CAN HELP

## Make a Donation

100% of your donation goes to the care and feeding of the raptors. The average cost to rehabilitate an injured raptor is \$1,000. Rehabilitation costs include hospitalization, medication, surgery, physical therapy, insurance, housing, food, and supplies. Please consider a donation to help these birds.

**Donate:** [donations@ocbpc.org](mailto:donations@ocbpc.org)

## Sponsor a Bird

A truly magnificent and unprecedented wildlife experience! Those who choose to sponsor a raptor release will don a glove, hold a raptor (take some great selfies!) and release it back into the wild! 100% of your donation provides medical care and food for a rehabilitating bird to aid in returning the injured bird to the wild. Upon your donation, you will receive a certificate denoting the bird you sponsor. Then when it is time for “your” bird to go back to the wild, we will contact you to attend and participate in the release. To learn more about sponsoring a bird, or for any other questions about raptors in Orange County,

**Visit our website:** [www.ocbpc.org](http://www.ocbpc.org)

## Book an Educational Talk

The long-term solution to preventing injury to raptors is through education.

Volunteers take birds to schools, Scout meetings, park programs, nature exhibits, and more. 100% of the fees go to the care, feeding, and rehabilitation of the birds treated at our center.

**Schedule a talk:** [schedule@ocbpc.org](mailto:schedule@ocbpc.org)

## Volunteer

Our entire staff are volunteers, including the veterinarians, surgery specialists, veterinary technicians, feeders, cage cleaners, educators, and others working behind the scenes to keep Orange County Bird of Prey Center running.

**Volunteer:** [saturday@ocbpc.org](mailto:saturday@ocbpc.org)



*Visit us on Facebook*



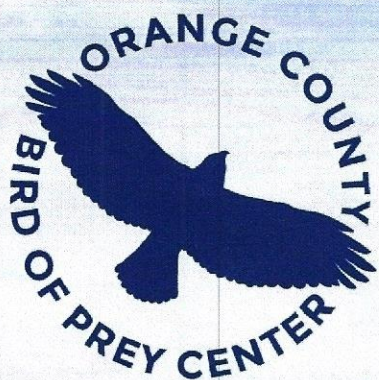
*Visit our Website*



*Visit us on Instagram*

NON-PROFIT CORPORATION TAX ID NUMBER: 33-0440942

Including OCBPC in your final giving plans allows you to enjoy the benefits of a gift to charity while making a powerful statement about your commitment to the local environment and education.



# Support Orange County's birds of prey today! Make a donation to build our new rehabilitation facilities!

## New Facility Donation:

Each donation includes a plaque on our donor wall, highlight on our website, a frameable photo of chosen raptor, and OCBPC T-Shirts (up to 4).

American Kestrel	\$1,000-\$2,000
Barn Owl	\$2,001-\$3,500
Peregrine Falcon	\$3,501-\$5,000
Golden Eagle	\$5,001-\$10,000

## Naming Opportunities:

Each donation will receive everything above along with private tour, a photo holding one of the education ambassadors, and large name plaque on mew.

Small Education Bird Mew (4)	\$15,000
Large Education Bird Mew (4)	\$20,000
Small (Kestrel, Burrowing Owl) Rehabilitation Mew (4):	\$25,000
Medium (Coopers Hawk, Barn Owl) Rehabilitation Mew (4):	\$40,000
Large (Red-Tailed Hawk, Great Horned Owl) Rehabilitation Mew (4):	\$50,000
Flight (Exercise, Peregrine Falcon) Mew (1):	\$200,000

Please contact Jean Savage at [donations@ocbpc.org](mailto:donations@ocbpc.org) or 949-230-1894  
PayPal or GuideStar for safe, online donations

25422 Trabuco Rd. #105-541, Lake Forest, CA 92630-2797 (949) 837-0786  
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WWW.OCBPC.ORG



# New Facility Phases

## Phase 1 - Find location in OC

Narrow opportunities to site  
Preliminary planning to determine best site  
Contract negotiations with County  
Approval process through Board of Supervisors

## Phase 2 – Prepare Site

Demo existing facilities  
Remove hazardous material  
Survey and renegotiate easement to Lot Line issues  
Layout of site  
Utilities on site

## Phase 3 – Education Bird Mews

Design Federally compliant mews (cages)  
Vendor bid process  
Fabricate Ed Bird Mews  
Delivery of Ed Bird Mews from Pennsylvania  
Install Ed Bird Mews

## Phase 4 - Water

Water Permit  
New Water Main and head flow  
Plumbing lines underground  
Water installed to Ed Bird Mews  
Plumbing installed to shed

## Phase 5 - Electricity

Audit of existing electrical infrastructure  
Bid process  
Repair, removal, install new infrastructure  
Electricity installed to Ed Bird Mews  
Electricity installed to shed  
County inspection and approval

## Phase 6 – Rehabilitation Mews

Design Federally compliant mews (cages)  
Vendor bid process  
Permitting  
Fabricate Rehab Mews  
Install Rehab Mews  
Final Utility Install

## Future Phases:

Additional Rehab Mews

Visitor Center

Amphitheater

Vet Hospital



## HOW TO HELP

**Volunteer:** We rely on volunteers for everything we do! We have roles for every ability, experience level, and time commitment: care for our birds, public education, fundraising and more.

**Spread the Word:** Support the conservation of birds of prey and all wildlife! Call to arrange a speaker for your school or club to help others learn about birds of prey and the important role they play.

**What to do if you find an injured raptor:** Do not touch the bird unless absolutely necessary! Go to <http://www.ocbpc.org/ive-found-an-injured-raptor.html> for tips. Or call your local animal control; in OC call (714) 935-6848.

## SUPPORT

### THE OC BIRD OF PREY CENTER:

Please consider a donation to support our work and the birds in our care!

BURROWING OWL CLUB.....	\$50
COOPERS HAWK CLUB.....	\$100
RED TAILED HAWK CLUB.....	\$250
GREAT HORNED OWL CLUB.....	\$500
EAGLE CLUB.....	\$1,000

There are many ways to support the future of the OC Bird of Prey Center!

- visit our website to make a donation: [www.ocbpc.com](http://www.ocbpc.com)
- mail a check to the address below
- call us at (949) 837-0786 for more information or to learn more about how you can include the OC Bird of Prey Center in your estate plans.

The OC Bird of Prey Center is solely supported through private donations



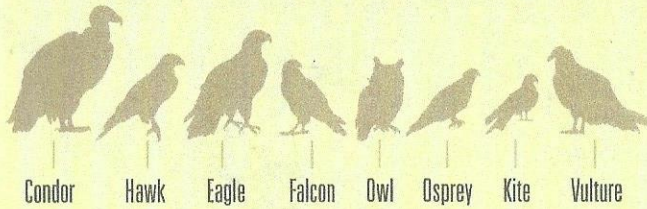
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Lake Forest, CA 92630  
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[www.ocbpc.org](http://www.ocbpc.org)

## EDUCATE REHABILITATE RELEASE



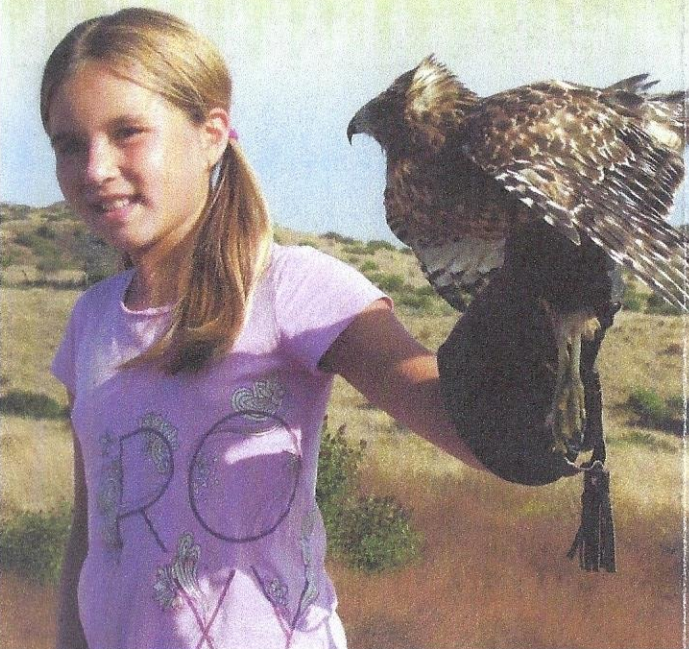
## ABOUT BIRDS OF PREY

Birds of Prey (also known as raptors) include owls, eagles, falcons, condors, hawks, ospreys, kites and vultures. These majestic birds have physical adaptations that help them catch food, such as grasping feet and binocular vision.



### Why are they important?

Raptors help maintain the balance of nature by controlling rodents, reptiles, insects and other prey. Like so many animals, birds of prey are under threat from habitat destruction, pesticides and other pollutants, and poisons aimed at killing the pests upon which they prey. Today we respect their role in the balance of nature by protecting them via state and federal laws.



## ABOUT THE ORANGE COUNTY BIRD OF PREY CENTER



**Educate:** Education is the best long-term solution to promote conservation and protection of birds of prey. Our volunteers take "Education Ambassador," birds that are unable to be released back into the wild, to schools, scout meetings, park programs, and nature exhibits to show the public the beauty of birds of prey!

**Rehabilitate:** Injured and orphaned birds of prey are brought to our center for care. We provide the injured birds with necessary medical treatment and help orphaned birds learn critical survival skills. We house and care for the birds until they are ready to be released.

**Release:** Once a bird is healed and can survive on its own, we release them to the wild. Setting them free is an awe inspiring experience! If you would like more information about attending a release or sponsoring a bird for release, please call us or visit our website.



## THE FUTURE OF THE ORANGE COUNTY BIRD OF PREY CENTER

The Orange County Bird of Prey Center is moving and growing! We are excited to expand our efforts towards education, rehabilitation and release.

The first phase of our plan is to move to a new and improved facility in 2019. The new facility includes housing (mews) for 250 wild birds, which will allow us to rehabilitate and release twice as many birds. The new, larger mews will also provide a healthier environment and more freedom for the birds under our care. This new facility will also allow us to provide education programs onsite. Future phases will include an interpretive center, educational amphitheater, and veterinary treatment facilities.





# ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

By DAVID WHITING  
dwhiting@scng.com

PUBLISHED: October 17, 2019 at 11:30 am  
UPDATED: October 18, 2019 at 9:11 am

## SEE HOW HUMANS HELP INJURED BIRDS OF PREY RETURN HOME

### Volunteers, veterinarian work to return injured raptors to the wild

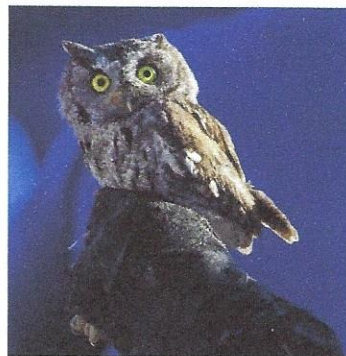
**I**t is one thing to venture into the wilderness, it is another thing to help nurture a wild creature back to health and set it free. That, my friends, is magic.

Wearing a thick black leather glove, Jennifer Pearlstein grips a huge red-tailed hawk's legs, sweeps her hand toward the heavens and lets go.

In seconds, the magnificent beast with a 4-foot wingspan soars above a small crowd invited by the Orange County Bird Of Prey Center and disappears over a hill.



As a small crowd looks on, a red-shouldered hawk is released at the Orange County Bird of Prey Center in Trabuco Canyon on Saturday, October 12, 2019. The Orange County Bird of Prey Center released 61 birds of prey that had been previously injured, including: Cooper's hawks, kestrels, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, screech owls, barn owls, and great horned owls, at four different locations. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG)



A volunteer with the Orange County Bird of Prey Center holds a Western Screech-Owl at their facility in Trabuco Canyon just before its release on Saturday, October 12, 2019. The Orange County Bird of Prey Center released 61 birds of prey that had been previously injured, including: Cooper's hawks, kestrels, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, screech owls, barn owls, and great horned owls, at four different locations. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG)

The release is over almost before it begins. But make no mistake, the moment is forever in Pearlstein's memory.

The Pilates instructor's tears of joy are born from a unique bond between human and bird, and Pearlstein will always be the last person to touch the hawk.

Yet as awesome as the release was, the most amazing thing on this day is that Pearlstein is not alone and neither is the animal.

In total, 63 birds of prey that were injured and would be dead without the efforts of deeply committed volunteers are released before the day is over. It is testimony to how relatively tame humans and very wild animals can live in harmony.

It also is one more step toward fulfilling a dream that has been incubating for years and only now is about to hatch.



A red-tailed hawk waits to be released back into the wild at Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park in Trabuco Canyon on Saturday, October 12, 2019. The Orange County Bird of Prey Center released 61 birds of prey that had been previously injured, including: Cooper's hawks, kestrels, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, screech owls, barn owls, and great horned owls, at four different locations. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG).

## CIRCLE OF LIFE

Perhaps it is no surprise there are relatively few nonprofit centers in the nation dedicated to healing wild critters and releasing them into the wild.

But to think such action doesn't pay would be wrong. If a price could be put on the happiness of saving nature's creatures, then the work of the Orange County Bird of Prey Center would certainly be one heck of a bargain.

For some three decades, the center has scraped by on scraps and the kindness of strangers. Yet against all odds, volunteers have managed to return some 3,000 birds to the wild.

For years, the family who owns and operates Rancho Las Lomas in Santiago Canyon has provided space for a series of shacks for healing raptors. But now, thanks to a \$1-a-year lease agreement with OC Parks, the Orange County Bird of Prey Center is finally preparing to move into permanent digs near the Upper Oso Reservoir.

Already, a series of cages are set up, more bird shelters are being added and an outdoor dirt amphitheater is in the works. For completion, the center only needs a few hundred-thousand dollars (hint, hint).

If you think, however, that saving birds of prey is nothing more than being nice, then you missed high school biology. There's that circle of life thing and raptors don't just dine on bird eggs. They help reduce pigeon and rat populations which, in turn, helps reduce disease.

And that's only part of the payoff.

And that's only part of the payoff.

Michelle Claud-Clemente is animal services manager for the city of Mission Viejo, as well as a long-time volunteer for the Orange County Bird of Prey Center.

"From an ecological standpoint," Claud-Clemente tells me, "every organism on this earth keeps all of our lives in balance."

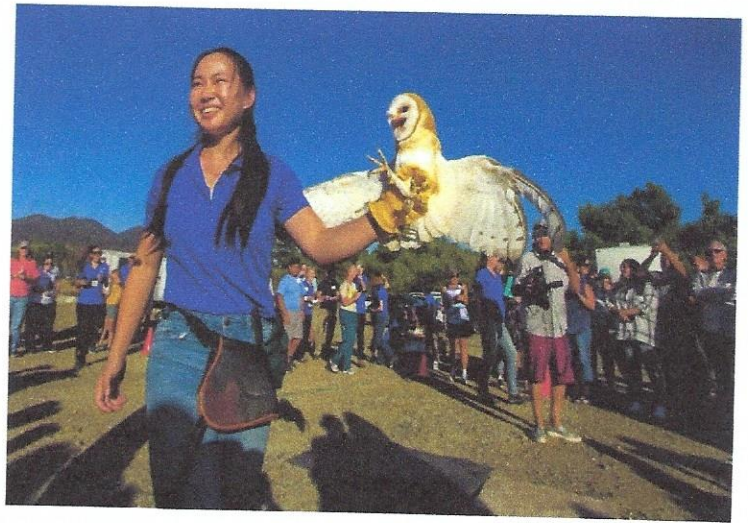
Claud-Clemente also points out that the wilderness and wild things enrich our lives.

"In our fast-paced, hectic world, when you see a soaring bird it helps you see your place in the world," she explains. "Nature makes us all better."

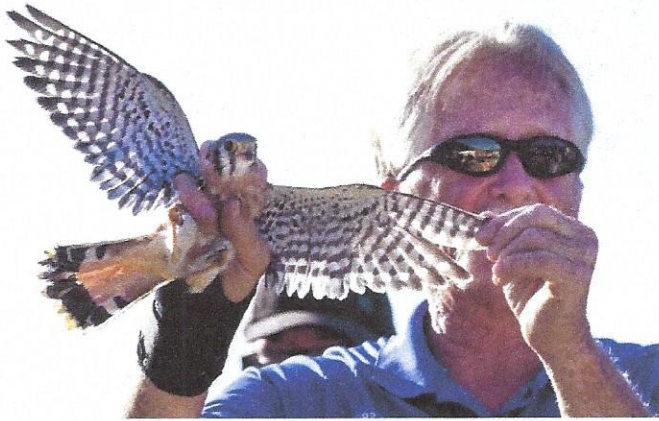
"You go for a walk in a park, and you feel better," she offers, adding of the outdoors, "It makes my heart sing."

With a day job caring for animals, I ask Claud-Clemente why she continues to help, even after hours.

Her answer is one we all can learn from: "I believe in volunteerism and working to make the community a better place."



Alex Shu, of Lake Forest, a volunteer with the Orange County Bird of Prey Center, holds a barn owl at their facility in Trabuco Canyon just before its release on Saturday, October 12, 2019. The Orange County Bird of Prey Center released 61 birds of prey that had been previously injured, including: Cooper's hawks, kestrels, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, screech owls, barn owls, and great horned owls, at four different locations. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG).



Dr. Scott Weldy speaks to the crowd about the kestrel he is holding at the Orange County Bird of Prey Center in Trabuco Canyon on Saturday, October 12, 2019. The Orange County Bird of Prey Center released 61 birds of prey that had been previously injured, including: Cooper's hawks, kestrels, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, screech owls, barn owls, and great horned owls, at four different locations. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG).

## DR. DOOLITTLE

At the center of the Orange County Bird of Prey Center is a veterinarian named Dr. Scott Weldy.

I hung out with Weldy several years ago and learned that the California Veterinary Medical Association cited him for meritorious service, eloquently stating: "If Noah needed a veterinarian on board the ark, Dr. Weldy could have been that veterinarian."

The association wasn't kidding.

In addition to Weldy's Orange County Bird of Prey Center, he also treats wild animals at the OC Zoo in Irvine Regional Park, the Santa Ana Zoo and the Exotic Feline Breeding Compound in Rosamond.

But his devotion isn't limited to wild critters. He earns his bread and butter at his Serrano Animal and Bird Hospital in Lake Forest where he treats regular pets such as dogs and cats. Then he uses some of the profits to heal, house and feed injured wildlife.

When I asked the Mission Viejo native what drew him to veterinary medicine, Weldy joked, "I thought being a single-species doctor sounded kind of boring."

On a more serious note, he offered, "There's nothing better than rehabilitating an animal and releasing it into the wild."

On the day of the raptor releases, Weldy stands in the middle of a circle of people first at a park in Lake Forest, then in Whiting Ranch Regional Park, next at the location of the budding new bird center and, lastly, on Santiago Canyon Road.

The reason for the different locations is that each spot fits the needs of the different species – big trees for kestrels, wide open land for hawks, hills and trees for owls.

As Weldy talks, he informs and entertains, explaining how raptors hunt by sight or sound depending on the species, how they are injured – often by vehicles – and the changes in bird populations over the years.

In the 1980s, for example, the veterinarian reports he usually saw three to five cooper hawks a year. Now, he sees that many in a single week.

The reason? With more development, there also are more trees and that allows for more cooper hawks.



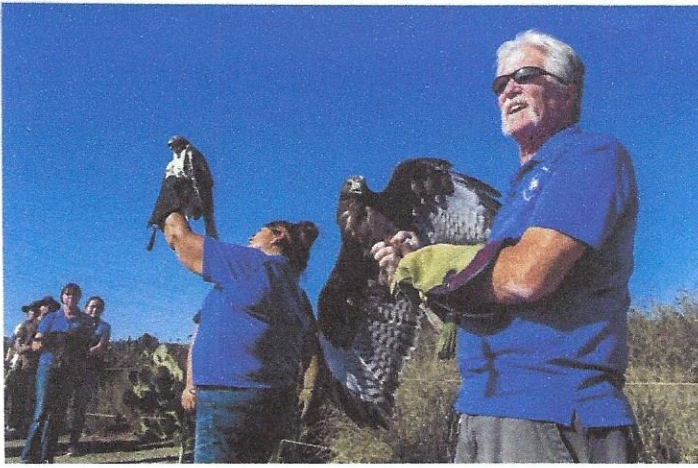
Jennifer Pearlstein releases a red-tailed hawk at Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park in Trabuco Canyon on Saturday, October 12, 2019. The Orange County Bird of Prey Center released 61 birds of prey that had been previously injured, including: Cooper's hawks, kestrels, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, screech owls, barn owls, and great horned owls, at four different locations. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG).

## TOUCHING THE DIVINE

Jeff Eales is another long-time volunteer for the bird of prey center. He allows that late December and early January is an especially tough time for wild birds.

The reason? Christmas BB and pellet guns.

Eales explains that if someone finds an injured bird, the best thing to do is to contact animal control and let them handle the critter.



Brenda Timoti, left, of Huntington Beach, a volunteer with the Orange County Bird of Prey Center, and Dr. Scott Weldy, right, both hold red-tailed hawks as Weldy, of the Serrano Animal & Bird Hospital, speaks to the crowd about the birds before they are released at Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park in Trabuco Canyon on Saturday, October 12, 2019.

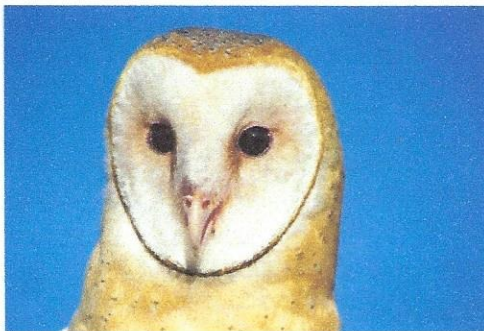
Hawks can injure people, he warns. But perhaps worse – at least for birds – is they might “imprint” or bond with a human and decide people are their friends.

Human imprinting, however, usually ends in the bird’s quick and accidental death.

Even the center minimizes its interaction with wild animals. “We want birds to be scared of us,” Eales points out. “It helps them stay alive.”

While we talk, Weldy comes over carrying a great horned owl and offers me the opportunity to release the bird. After watching dozens of others do the same, I accept but figure it’s no big deal.

Dumb.



A barn owl surveys the crowd moments before its release at the Orange County Bird of Prey Center in Trabuco Canyon on Saturday, October 12, 2019. (Photo by Mark Rightmire Register/SCNG)

If you’ve ever looked into the bright gold eyes of a great horned owl at the end of your arm, you have looked directly into the wild.

Weldy hands me a thick leather glove and explains how to grasp the owl’s upper legs, putting two fingers between them and gripping gently, but firmly.



The face of a great horned owl as it waits to be released at the Orange County Bird of Prey Center in Trabuco Canyon on Saturday, October 12, 2019. The Orange County Bird of Prey Center released 61 birds of prey that had been previously injured, including: Cooper’s hawks, kestrels, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, screech owls, barn owls, and great horned owls, at four different locations. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG)

I step away holding my new feathered friend, swing my arm high and open my hand.

The great horned owl stretches it’s 5-foot wingspan and with a rush of feathers against air, vanishes over a vast valley.

My body can’t fly, but my heart can.

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For youth group sponsorships, please contact [donations@ocbpc.org](mailto:donations@ocbpc.org)

**BIRD PREFERENCE SELECTION (In Order of Availability):** Selection and sponsorship of an individual species does not guarantee actual release of requested species. Substitutions may occur based on availability at time of release.

RED SHOULDERED HAWK \_\_\_\_\_ RED-TAILED HAWK \_\_\_\_\_ COOPERS HAWK \_\_\_\_\_

GREAT HORNED OWL \_\_\_\_\_ BARN OWL \_\_\_\_\_ KESTREL \_\_\_\_\_ SCREECH OWL \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER AVAILABLE \_\_\_\_\_

OCBPC also has several "PERMANENT RESIDENT BIRDS" that are non-releasable and require continual support. These birds are foster parents for young birds and education ambassadors. If you would like to sponsor their continuing care instead of a releasable bird, please email [donations@ocbpc.org](mailto:donations@ocbpc.org).

Thank you for your support!  
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