



Arizona's Raptor Experience, LLC

December 2016

~Newsletter~



Season's Greetings!

Thank you for all of your support and encouragement this past year!

We wish you and your family all the best and a very happy holiday season.





Lena...or Leopold?



Just a few weeks ago on November 17th we welcomed a new adult Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) that we have since named Leopold- after the late, great wildlife scientist Rand Aldo Leopold. “Leo” – for short- was transferred to us from the World Bird Sanctuary in Missouri. He is a partially flighted bird with a wing injury and is about 12 years old. We’re still gathering information about the bird’s past – but interestingly, until now, it was thought that Leo was a female (named Lena for 12 years!). Paul and

I really believe, based on behavior and size, that the bird is actually a male.

Determining the sex of raptors can be difficult, and in some species not possible in the field. Reversed sexual dimorphism (di=two, morph = shape or appearance) is typical in raptors. “Reversed” because it is the female who is considered “different” than the male, unlike in mammals or other birds where the male is larger, has antlers, is more colorful, etc. In most cases, the female raptor is larger. Up to a third larger in fact which is beneficial as she produces the eggs, does the majority of the incubation and is present for nest defense. She also tends to be more aggressive and really “rules the roost.” In Bald Eagles, the dimorphism is evident in the size of the birds, their wings, feet, beak, etc. but their plumage (feathers) is the same. In some species of raptors the dimorphism goes beyond size, but also includes plumage. For example, in Northern Harriers (*Circus cyaneus*) and American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) the male’s plumage looks different from the females. And in other species, the plumage is the same and the size difference is not marked enough to differentiate the sexes with certainty, like in Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) for example.

The size difference in Bald Eagles does make determining sex possible. Eagle researcher Gary Bortolotti found that two body measurements could be used to accurately sex eagles: beak depth and length of the hallux (hind talon). However, this can be complicated by where the eagle originated. Bergmann’s rule is an ecogeographical rule that basically states that birds living in colder climates (north) are larger than birds living in warm climates (south). This is

beneficial when heat retention or loss is necessary. A blood test can also provide a definitive answer.

Leo is still getting used to his new enclosure, his new companion Joy and new people. It will be a while before we can take measurements! Still, based on his rather timid behavior which is typical of a male eagle and the visible size difference between Leo and Joy, we are comfortable with our assessment and pleased to welcome him.

A Companion for Stihl



There are many things to consider when it comes to housing and caring for captive raptors. Their enclosures have to meet size requirements, include the proper perches, cover, a weathering area, a bath pan, etc. One must also consider proper nutrition, safety in the enclosures, protection from predators and enrichment.

For some birds enrichment means having new objects put in their enclosures for play (the Eurasian Eagle Owls love scrunched up newspapers and stuffed animals!). In most cases, the best enrichment is a companion. When possible, we house two birds together. In some cases we place a male and female together, but companions do not have to be the opposite sex or in some cases even the same species. As long as they are close to the same size (avoiding a predator/prey situation is important), even different species can be placed together for companionship.

Timber, a new Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*), who came to us from Great Basin Wildlife Rescue in Utah, is a wonderful new companion for Stihl, a little Saw-whet Owl named for Stihl chainsaws (they are fierce little predators!). Timber, having laid eggs, is a known female. Although we are not sure, we believe Stihl to be a female as well. The birds are getting along famously. They are often seen perched next to each other in their enclosure and we have been able to remove the stuffed animal owl that used to keep Stihl company.



A Gift for Nature



Although many of us celebrate the gifts of nature year-round, we don't always think of what we can give back to nature in return. In this season of gift giving, we'd like to suggest a simple yet very beneficial offering that will last for years to come.

Pictured here is a red morph Screech Owl (*Megascops asio*) who is using this nesting box as a roosting site in winter. Screech Owls commonly sun themselves during the day sitting in the entrance hole to the nest box. This is a wonderful opportunity to view the bird making use of the box even outside of the nesting season.

Another species that is becoming less common in AZ that will readily utilize a nesting box such as this is the American Kestrel. The kestrel is the smallest member of the Falconidae (falcon family) here in the U.S. Arizona Game and Fish biologists are initiating a study of the population trends of this falconid species, with particular interest in birds that may be in the Sonoran Desert. However, they are also interested in data from other parts of the state.



Photo by Eric Gofreed, DVM



We plan to participate in this study by monitoring nesting boxes we have placed on our own property in Chino Valley. We've also placed boxes for others, and are happy to assist anyone else who wishes to do the same. In fact, if you need a gift idea for that nature lover in your life who has *everything*...consider a nesting box! As time permits, we will help build and place boxes in the appropriate area to encourage nesting and roosting birds.

If interested in giving a nesting box as a gift, contact us at arizonasraptorexperience@gmail.com. We ask that you cover the cost of the materials, but Paul will construct the box. We would also be happy to generate a gift certificate for you.

Guest photo:



Coda

by: Eric Gofreed, DVM

