



## Arizona's Raptor Experience, LLC

~Newsletter~

November 2016

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### *Greetings from Chino Valley!*

*We want to begin this newsletter by extending a special thanks to Jay's Bird Barn for including us in their open house events this past October – it was so nice to see so many of you there.*

*Fall has descended quickly and we're witnessing changes in our bird friends in the yard. The only remaining hummingbirds are Anna's, who tend to stick around the longest before winter. There are many White-crowned Sparrows bathing in the bird baths and we've said good-bye temporarily to the Swainson's Hawks who've migrated south for the winter. The Gambel's Quail are showing up in droves every morning to take advantage of both the bird baths and the seed we provide – it's great fun to watch them. We hope you're enjoying your yard birds as much as we are – and we hope you enjoy this month's newsletter.*



Interested in providing a nesting box on your property for local raptors? If you provide the materials, we'll make the box and help with placement! Call Paul at 928-460-2634.



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## Wildlife Trees

“The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing which stands in the way.” - William Blake 1799

Although this quote by William Blake refers to trees that are living, it’s not unfair to note that the same could be said about trees that have died. Unfortunately the value of trees, alive or dead, to wildlife is often overlooked when construction begins. How can a dead tree be important? Let’s talk about the many ways...

Trees can actually provide more habitat for wildlife after they have died! Dead trees in the landscape are often called snags and provide birds, mammals, insects, reptiles and amphibians places for nesting, nurseries, storage areas, foraging sites, roosting, and perching sites. Over 85 species of birds in North America utilize dead trees in some fashion. As many as 45 species of wildlife forage for food in dead trees, downed or still standing.



Juniper snag at our home. Chino Valley



Male American Kestrel by Eric Gofreed,



Close up of cavity forming in juniper snag at left.

Woodpeckers use dead trees not only to forage for insects, but also create natural cavities in them for nesting. Once abandoned by the woodpecker, these cavities become an invaluable resource for other cavity nesting species, like American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) and Western Screech Owls (*Megascops kennicottii*). In an AZ ponderosa pine forest, removal of some live and dead timber reduced nesting bird populations by 50%!

Because not all dead trees can be safely left standing (they may do damage if they fall), it is fortunate that Kestrels and Screech Owls, as well as many other birds, will use man-made cavities in the form of nesting boxes. With wholesale

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felling of southern flooded timber in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, placing boxes actually prevented the extinction of the Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) a century ago.

Nesting boxes for small birds of prey can easily be constructed and placed in wide open areas, on the edges of the forest and even in small back yards in the city. If no trees are available, a sturdy pole can be used to support the box. Make sure to research the appropriate size of the box and entrance hole, appropriate positioning (don't face the hole into the prevailing wind direction!) and remove domestic cats that free roam and kill fledglings that land on the ground.

Plans for Kestrel/Screech Owl boxes can be found on our website, [www.arizonasraptorexperience.com](http://www.arizonasraptorexperience.com) under "Meet the Birds." Smokey the Western Screech Owl.



Kestrel box placed in September on our neighbor's ranch in Prescott.

### ***Word(s) of the month:***

**Primary cavity nester:** Birds that excavate their own holes for the purpose of nesting.

**Secondary cavity nester:** Animals that take advantage of natural or abandoned cavities that they did not excavate, for the purpose of nesting.

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## *The Atypical Swainson's Hawk*

In September of 2015 here in Chino Valley, Paul and I witnessed our first large kettle of hawks since moving from upstate New York to Arizona. We quickly pulled the truck to the side of the road and grabbed the binoculars for a better look. The excitement we felt increased dramatically as we identified the over 50 birds in the group as Swainson's Hawks (*Buteo swainsoni*), who begin to gather in late August / early September into large groups, feasting on grasshoppers by day and roosting together at night. These gregarious birds migrate in groups numbering well into the thousands. In fact, nearly the entire North American population migrates annually, taking advantage of thermals and northerly winds during the day to move great distances with as little energy as possible.

The birds are moving from their breeding grounds which include western and central portions of the United States and continue as far north as Canada to their wintering grounds in South America, primarily in the pampas (grasslands) of Argentina. The round trip flight for birds breeding in Canada is upwards of 20,000 km (approx. 12,500 miles), a distance second only to the migration of Arctic Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus tundrius*). En route to South America, the birds are funneled over land as they rarely fly over open water during the migration. Monitoring (hawk watch) sites in places like Panama City have documented over 350,000 Swainson's Hawks in October and November. Upwards of 845,000 Swainson's Hawks have been documented in one fall over Veracruz, Mexico. Most birds arrive in Argentina in late October, early November where grasshoppers are abundant during austral summer.

Swainson's Hawks are unusual among other *Buteos* as they are almost exclusively insectivorous outside the breeding season. When they have young, rabbits, rodents and reptiles provide the higher protein content necessary for developing chicks. It is for this reason that few austringers (falconers fly falcons, austringers fly hawks or eagles) train and hunt with this species. Although this is the case, we are currently working with Emily, pictured here, who was transferred to Paul last December from a rehabilitator in Utah. Emily is considered a sub-adult, still wearing her juvenile plumage which Swainson's Hawks keep for two years, unlike other hawks.



Photo by Eric Gofreed, DVM



Emily, radio-transmitter attached, flying in the yard. Photo by Eric Gofreed, DVM

Our goal is to hunt with Emily for small birds or possibly even rabbits. Regardless, it is a thrill to see her fly free and return to the gauntlet.

### ***Guest Photo***



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*Photo by Jackie Klieger*

[www.jackiekliegerphotography.com](http://www.jackiekliegerphotography.com)

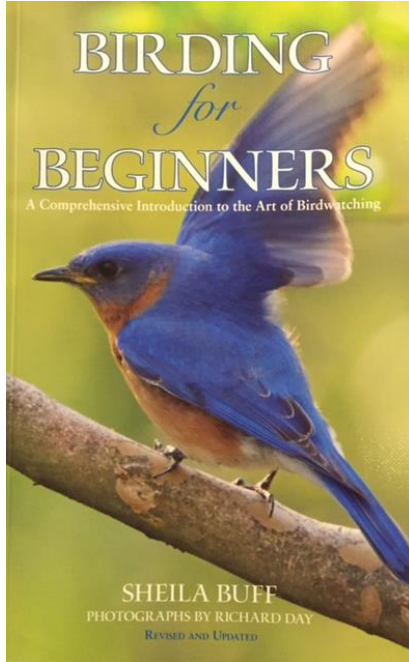
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Up, up and away! Emily launching...

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**The Book Corner**



Need a gift for your favorite outdoor enthusiast or budding bird watcher? Consider this book for beginning birdwatchers. It's part of the Falcon Guides series, published in 2010, 202 pages.

*A Coupon for You!*

**\$5 off**

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(One coupon per group please)

Expires January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017

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