



## Arizona's Raptor Experience, LLC

~Newsletter~

October 2016

### *Greetings from Chino Valley!*

*We hope you're enjoying this beautiful fall weather by getting out and spending time outdoors. This is a wonderful time to see many species of birds that are, and have been, migrating through on their way to their wintering grounds. You may even see some hawks hunting in your yard as they fuel up to make their way south.*

*In this newsletter we feature Cooper's Hawks. Together with their smaller cousin, the Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawks will take advantage of the migrating song birds as they stop to bathe in bird baths and feed at backyard feeders. We have two juvenile birds here that make a play for the quail almost daily!*

*Remember, if you'd like to submit a photo to be featured in our newsletter next month, send it my way! We'd also be happy to help with hawk ID.*

### **Upcoming Events**

Please join us at:

### **Jays Bird Barn**

JaysBirdBarn.com  
928-443-5900

11 am - 2 pm

Oct. 27 Flagstaff

Oct. 28 Sedona

Oct. 29 Prescott

## *Backyard Encounters with a Cooper's Hawk... or Two!*



There is nothing more exciting than bearing witness to the antics of wild animals unaware of your presence. Our dear friend and neighbor, Pat Azlin, had such an opportunity with a pair of juvenile Cooper's Hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*). How does one get so lucky? Well, food, cover and water provided in the yard can be key factors. In this case, available trees, a bird feeder to attract songbirds - which becomes another kind of "bird feeder"...and of course water. Pat was able to document the visitors with her

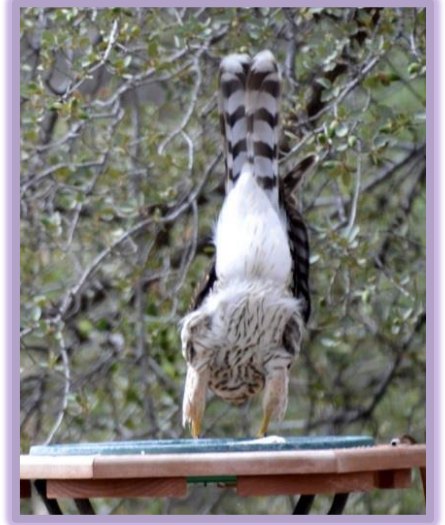
camera from her "blind" in the kitchen.

Juvenile Cooper's Hawks can be easier to view as they have yet to learn the art of the sneak attack. Adult Cooper's Hawks are masters at using cover to conceal their presence until unsuspecting prey are momentarily off guard, then striking. Experienced birds strike once and if they miss, the chase is abandoned balancing energy used versus what could be gained (prey). Young birds often attack in the open and are unsuccessful more often than not. To learn quickly is to survive.

Cooper's Hawks feed primarily on other birds, although they have been known to take small mammals when available, and in CA and AZ will also consume lizards. The smaller maneuverable male is entirely responsible for hunting and providing food for himself, the female and the nestlings during the breeding season. A pair of Cooper's Hawks has a strong attachment to their territory and will construct many nests there over time. The presence of a plucking post, where the male plucks and cleans the food before taking to the nest, is a sure sign that an active nest is nearby.

Perhaps this young pair of birds will make their nest in our neighborhood and once again show up for a visit.

*Note the size difference between the male (L) and female (R)*



*All photos by Pat Azlin*

## *The Impressive African Hawk-Eagle “Hilda”: Both Hunter and Teacher*

*A random phone call one evening to an old falconry friend in northern NY in January 2015, to discuss onerous Golden Eagle regulations, ironically led to an offer to acquire his 14-year-old female African Hawk-Eagle!*

And so, the weekend of February 21<sup>st</sup> we drove to Watertown to pick up a magnificent, fairly tractable hawk-eagle whom I affectionately named after my dear grandmother Hilda (1899-1979) – beloved by everyone who knew her including Farney Wurlitzer of Wurlitzer Organ Co. fame. Mr. and Mrs. Wurlitzer hired ‘gram’ off the farm as a young woman of 20 to be their head maid for many years in the Wurlitzer Mansion in N. Tonawanda, NY. This tribute recognizes Gram who always supported my love of wildlife, learning and outdoor activities...



Most years, upstate New York winters are brutal. That February, wind chills frequently dipped into the minus 30's and Hilda spent much of that month and March inside with us, quickly becoming familiar with Anne's three indoor cats, Led Zeppelin music, neighbors and visitors to our home in Hilton. (This special time is called 'manning' in old falconry jargon.)

On warm winter days above 20 F. Hilda spent her time outdoors soaking up sunshine while getting acquainted with her new neighbors: Harris's Hawks, Bald Eagles, Barred Owls, Peregrine Falcons, et. al. At night she'd stay indoors on her block perch and in her spacious giant hood. This gently orchestrated month-long program prepared her for her future role here in Arizona.

Captive non-native raptors fall outside strictly enforced USFWS and AZ state regulations that govern virtually every aspect of native birds of prey. Utilizing CITES (non-native) species allows us to offer our clients and visitors the incredible privilege and rare opportunity to legally handle our meticulously manned and amazingly gentle Eurasian Eagle Owls and Hilda the hawk-eagle.

2016 marks my 45<sup>th</sup> year being with raptors in research, education, falconry and rehabilitation. By far the most personally gratifying experience is when a young admirer lights up over the chance to experience a raptor at arm's length. Remember, these young 'tactile learners' are the next generation of stewards of

America's wildlife and natural resources! Some adults call this a 'bucket list' opportunity. For most, this memorable experience will remain forever!



African Hawk-Eagles (AHE's) are widespread in the wooded hills of sub-Saharan Africa, from dry highland areas in Namibia to the Miombo woodlands (named for the miombo trees that dominate the grasslands) of Zimbabwe. (In 2007 we hunted and photographed plains game in Namibia, and never saw AHE's.) Their range encompasses about 4800 mi<sup>2</sup>.

AHE's are roughly the size (and strength) of Ferruginous Hawks of the western US: females are 25" tall with a 5' wingspan and weigh 3 – 3.8 lbs. Hilda's usual flying weight is 1440-1500g. or 3.17-3.3 lbs. AHE's catch reptiles, small mammals like hares and hyrax, and large birds such as Guinea fowl and francolins that can weigh over 8 lbs. - nearly triple their weight!

The adults' stick nest is 3' across, located in the fork of a mopane or *Acacia* tree near a wooded river bank. Incubation by both parents of the 2 eggs takes about 44 days. Eaglets leave the nest at 73 days and are fully independent 3 months later.

AHE's are currently listed as Least Concern by Bird Life International despite the fact that the population appears to be decreasing due to endless forest cutting and habitat fragmentation by an exploding human population.

AHE's scientific name: *Hieraaetus spilogaster* (Bonaparte, 1850) was placed in the Golden Eagle Genus *Aquila* in 2014. There are 15 species of hawk-eagles and additionally 10 subspecies known worldwide. Although the Ferruginous Hawk *Buteo regalis* strongly resembles structural and behavioral similarity to the AHE *Aquila spilogaster* (from the Greek for 'a spot on the belly') taxonomists have yet to group the large eagle-like Ferruginous Hawk in the Genus *Aquila*.

Up here at 5,000' (similar to her natal lands at Lat. 34.75 deg. N) Hilda enjoys flying and chasing wood rats and cottontails, and thrilling visitors and photographers with a rare opportunity to make special memories and beautiful photo ops.

Footnote: According to the Population Reference Bureau sub-Saharan Africa, the world's poorest region, will more than double from 926 million to 2.2 BILLION in the next 37 years. By the year 2050, Africa's population will grow by a staggering 1.3 BILLION people – while the world looks away.

Absent any immediate continent-wide birth control program, is it time we say 'good bye forever' to eagles and other African wildlife?



According to the legendary eagle biologist Dr. Leslie Brown, 'The African Hawk-Eagle is probably the most potent predator relative to their size of any eagles.'



Hilda's amazing vet and our friend Dr. Jay Geasling following her 1<sup>st</sup> checkup in April 2015. Buffalo, NY.

Hilda's massive, powerful hallux, or hind talon that is used to efficiently dispatch prey 2 to 4x their own weight!



*Thanks to Eric Gofreed, DVM for the first two photos of Hilda in this article!*

*Guest Photo:*



*Juvenile Cooper's Hawk, Chino Valley, AZ*

*Taken by Pat Azlin*

*Guest poem:*

*Raptor*

Swift shadow on the field  
Bolting prey scramble  
One in vain  
Apex vision  
Her choice is made  
Fierce elegance, piercing cries  
Oh, for one moment aloft behind  
your eyes

by Mychael Barnes,  
Prescott, AZ

## Hawk ID Submission – who do we have here?



### Photo submitted by Cynthia Brush

Paul and I have identified this backyard visitor as an adult Cooper's Hawk. These are birds designed to live in and around trees where they nest and hunt primarily other birds. They have short rounded wings and long tail feathers used like a rudder to help them maneuver quickly. There can be a lot of difficulty identifying this species because they

look very similar to their close cousin, the Sharp-shinned Hawk, and because there are marked differences in size between males and females and in the plumage of juvenile versus adult birds. A great on-line resource with tips to identifying Cooper's vs. Sharp-shinned Hawks is the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Project FeederWatch site: <http://feederwatch.org/learn/tricky-bird-ids/coopers-hawk-and-sharp-shinned-hawk>.

Here are a few tips that we use to help distinguish the two:

Cooper's Hawk = COHA

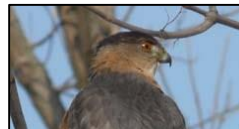
Sharp-shinned Hawk = SSHA

Tail shape when sitting:

Coloration on head/shoulders:



**COHA**  
**Curved**



**COHA**  
**Cap** (lighter color on neck)



**SSHA**  
**Square**



**SSHA**  
**Shawl** (dark continuous)

**COHA** legs/feet are thicker, or “**C**hunky”

Whereas a **SSHA**'s legs/feet are “**S**harp or **S**kinny”

A **COHA**'s head is **C**apacious (large compared to body size)

Whereas a **SSHA**'s head is **S**mall compared to body size