



Arizona's Raptor Experience, LLC

June 2017

~Newsletter~

Greetings from Chino Valley!

We hope you are doing well and enjoying the warm weather. Although we have not yet reached summer solstice, there are many signs of summer – Swainson's Hawks can be seen soaring and searching for insects, baby quail are everywhere, Western Bluebirds are frequenting our nesting box and the nighthawks have returned!

This past week we have had the joy of observing a group of five Western Screech Owls using a nesting box near our house. The adult can be seen sunning herself during the day and leaving the box to hunt at night. We first watched the owlets peek through the opening of the box as they waited for their parent to return with food, and just recently we saw them branch for the first time! We were able to band all four owlets – see the story in this issue.



Upcoming Event:

Creatures of the Night- The Benefits of Attracting Owls and Bats

Join us on Saturday, August 12th
9:30 a.m.

at

Watters Garden Center

Prescott, AZ

www.WattersGardenCenter.com

Four species of live owls will be
on site.

Bring your camera!



Banding the Neighborhood Owlets



This past March, Paul and I banded an adult Western Screech Owl (*Megascops kennicottii*) that was using a nesting box at our neighbor's house. On June 2nd, we recaptured the same bird using a nest box near **our**

house – a fact we could have only determined by banding the bird. Even more exciting was the fact that she had produced 4 owlets! All four were healthy – the adult is a very good provider. (We've certainly noticed a great decline in the number of rodents near the house!) We were able to safely remove all four owlets (and mom) from the nest box, collect data from each bird,



band them and return them to the box. Ever since that day we've thoroughly enjoyed watching as they have begun exploring the world outside the nest box. So, why did we band these birds?



As volunteers participating in the study being conducted by AZ Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) on American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) Paul and I have been placing nesting boxes around northern AZ, including on our property. We are authorized by way of banding permits from the USGS Biological Resources Division Bird Banding Lab (BBL) and from the AZGFD to band nestling and adult American Kestrels and Western Screech Owls (both cavity nesting birds) who occupy those boxes. Banding the birds with an aluminum leg band imprinted with a unique 9-digit number allows us or anyone else who comes across these birds to identify them as individuals. All banding data is reported to the BBL, who in turn provides the data to anyone reporting contact with the bird.

Bird banding is a wildlife management tool that aids scientists in research and management activities. The data collected from each bird can be useful in a variety of ways. For example, scientists have been able to determine longevity

of individual bird species, map migration routes which aids in decisions about habitat preservation, learn about the social structure in bird populations, understand behaviors important for the bird's survival, determine reproductive success and much more.

By banding the owlets, we can potentially monitor their dispersal to neighboring properties where nest boxes have been placed and document reproduction success when they become mature and produce their own young. We can also chart their mother's success in future nesting seasons.



What data must be collected when banding birds?

- Date
- Location
- Species
- Band number
- Age
- Sex

Additional data collected about the nest box:

- Geographic coordinates
- Mounting surface (tree, pole, etc.)
- Entrance orientation (N, S, E, W)
- Height from the ground
- Predator deterrent present?
- Elevation of property
- Shade or full sun?
- Box dimensions
- Month/year installed





Common Nighthawk

What is a nighthawk?

According to folklore, the nighthawks and nightjars (Caprimulgidae), two crepuscular/nocturnal groups of birds, would fly into barns at night to suck dry the milk of goats. While this old belief is erroneous, the birds are still known collectively today as the “goatsuckers.”

Because these birds have soft, dark, cryptically colored plumage, primarily nocturnal habits and loud voices they are often grouped with owls. However, there are significant differences between them. The goatsuckers have short legs, weak feet, small bills with a wide gape to capture insects in flight and eyes on the sides of the head instead of forward facing eyes like owls. Their flight patterns also differ significantly. The Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) for example, has an erratic flight pattern and is often compared to bats in flight.

Like many owls, the coloration of the goatsuckers mimics the earthy tones of tree bark, soil, leaf litter and gravel, therefore these birds are rarely seen during the day. They basically become invisible to diurnal predators and birdwatchers when they roost. As with other nocturnal birds, the goatsuckers are most easily identified by their calls rather than their appearance. One very recognizable call is the vocalization of the of the Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*).

Calls are primarily used during the breeding season, but calls made in flight can also be heard. Nighthawks are aerial hunters and are considered specialists at sustained aerial foraging. Nightjars tend to hunt from a perch or the ground. Both have small beaks but a huge gape which allows them to engulf large insects. Even so, winged ants and termites, little moths, mosquitos and small flies are consumed in huge numbers. As many as 2,000 have been noted in their large gullets.

As insectivores these birds play an important role in the environment, reducing pest insect populations.

Unfortunately, declines in some species can be linked to use of insecticides, loss of open habitat and being struck by cars. Others, however, have benefited from the clearings created by grazing, small scale logging and forest fires which create nesting and roosting habitat.



Guest photos

Great Horned Owls (*Bubo bubo*) at Willow Lake

by Karen Levitch



Adult Owl



Owlet regurgitating a pellet



Two owlets branching – travelling on branches before they can fly.