



Rocky Mountain  
**RAPTOR**  
Program  
a second chance at freedom

Winter 2025 Newsletter

# ON THE *Wing*

## What a Year It Has Been...

As the year comes to a close, I'm filled with gratitude and awe at what our RMRP community has accomplished in 2025. This year has been one of transformation, celebration, and hope—made possible by our donors, supporters, volunteers, and the public. Every raptor released, every life saved, and every mind inspired reflects your dedication to our mission.

One of our most exciting milestones was the **approval of the 2H initiative**. This City-initiated and community-backed decision brings us closer to a permanent home for RMRP, securing a future where raptors and people can thrive side by side, and launches an exciting collaboration with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. Closer to home, we celebrated the completion of a **new roof on our large flight enclosure**, a critical upgrade that enhances the safety and well-being of our patients.

This year also marks a significant transition in our leadership. After **38 remarkable years, Gail Kratz** steps down as Director of Rehabilitation and Research. Gail's wisdom, compassion, and dedication have shaped every aspect of RMRP, leaving a legacy that will endure for decades. We are thrilled to welcome **Carrie Laxson** as our new Director of Rehabilitation and Research. Carrie has served over 10yrs with RMRP, and her rehabilitation expertise, deep passion, and innovative ideas will guide our rehabilitation and research programs into an inspired future.

Looking ahead, we are excited to gather together for our **33rd Annual Gala on February 28, 2026**, celebrating you, our supporters, and the thousands of raptors whose lives you have helped transform.

As we reflect on this remarkable year, I am reminded that hope truly takes flight when a community comes together. Thank you for your generosity, commitment, and belief in the power of conservation.

Together, we will continue to adapt, innovate, and ensure that hope - and raptors - take flight.

With greatest gratitude,

Carin Avila  
Executive Director



### In This Issue:

- Message from the Executive Director
- Together, We Stand Guard
- Holiday Shopping
- Thank you, Ambassadors & Coordinators!
- You're Invited!
- It's The Best Time To Give!



*"When I was in second grade, the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program visited my school. Seeing the Ambassador birds up close left a lasting impression on me and inspired a lifelong appreciation for wildlife and the importance of rehabilitation. I am grateful for the meaningful work the program does to rescue, heal, and educate, creating a lasting impact on both the animals in their care and the communities they serve."*

~Nathan Rodarmel

# Together, We Stand Guard for Colorado's Raptors

## You Helped Turn a Roadside Tragedy Into a Soaring Success

Last April, a Fort Collins driver made a shocking discovery — a young Red-tailed Hawk had collided with their truck and become trapped in the grill. Thanks to a quick call for help, our team responded right away and carefully freed the hawk from the vehicle.

The bird's injuries were serious: multiple wing fractures and severe soft tissue damage. But because you make it possible for expert care, nutritious food, and advanced rehabilitation to be ready at a moment's notice, this hawk was given the best possible chance to heal.

Over the next 144 days, that chance turned into a triumph. With patience, physical therapy, and time to heal, the hawk's strength

returned. Its early clumsy flight attempts gradually transformed into powerful, steady wingbeats. By September the once-broken bird soared confidently again.

When release day came, the hawk lifted into the bright Colorado sky — strong, resilient, and free.

That moment of flight was only possible because of you. Your compassion turns accidents into recoveries... and second chances into new beginnings.

Thank you for being the reason wild lives can return home.



*Above: We never tire of seeing them fly away.*



*Above: A devastating injury turned to hope.*

*Above: In recovery, day 87, wing droop still healing.*

## Thanks To You, We're Ready - When Nature Throws Its Most Brutal Punches

This fall, a familiar threat has returned to our area. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), the virus that has devastated wild and domestic birds in recent years, is back earlier than expected and we now consider this deadly virus endemic.

Because of your support, the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program is prepared. Your generosity keeps vital biosecurity protocols, protective gear, and diagnostic testing in place so our team can act swiftly and safely when illness strikes.

In mid-September, your impact was put to the test. A Great Horned Owl from Loveland was found unresponsive and, despite quick action, didn't survive the trip to our hospital. The next day, a Turkey Vulture from a different part of Loveland arrived, showing severe neurological symptoms. Tests confirmed what we feared - both birds were positive for HPAI.

Thanks to you, we responded immediately, we prevented further spread within our hospital. Because of your support, RMRP has had one of the best track records of success in treating HPAI of all raptor rehabilitation programs across the country, and remains a frontline defender for Colorado's raptors and the ecosystem we all share.

While this virus is severe, your support helps us approach it with vigilance, not panic. Together, we can learn more to protect both wild and in-house birds through innovative prevention.

If you keep poultry or spend time outdoors, we encourage you to review your flock safety practices:

- Defend the Flock — USDA Resource
- <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/defend-the-flock>



*Our hearts break when we see a majestic raptor shattered by Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. This deadly virus continues to affect wild birds across the country, and even the strongest eagles, hawks, and owls can fall victim. Every case reminds us why disease monitoring, biosecurity, and public awareness are so vital to protecting raptors and all wildlife.*

*Thank you for being the reason RMRP - and the birds we protect - can face whatever comes next.*

*-Carin Avila, RMRP Executive Director*

# Cases

## The Last Kids to Leave

**Because of you, young owls got the time - and care - they needed to grow strong and free.**

Every spring, Great Horned Owls are the first young raptors to arrive at RMRP for care – and almost always the last to leave. These “tigers of the sky” take their time growing up, and who can blame them? In the wild, parents continue to provide backup meals and guidance well into the fall while their youngsters learn to hunt on their own.

This year, four young owls needed that extra time and care. Each one had fallen from its nest and arrived injured. Because of you, they received expert medical treatment, learned vital survival skills from a nurturing non-releasable foster owl, and even graduated from “live prey school.”

Thanks to you, we can mirror that natural learning process here at RMRP. Your generosity makes it possible for our team to use a “soft-release” approach - giving each owl the freedom to explore the world at its own pace, while knowing a safe meal is waiting if the learning curve doesn’t go well. Bit by bit, those support meals taper off until the owls are entirely self-sufficient and ready to disperse and claim the night sky.

This fall, the moment they’d been preparing for finally came — the soft-release door swung open. One owl peered out, hesitant, before being nudged aside by a bolder sibling eager to take flight. Within moments, all four disappeared into the evening, strong and ready for life on their own.

Their Second Chance at Freedom was only possible because you cared.

And while these four have taken to the skies, 55 more patients are still in care — each one relying on your compassion, your belief, and your continued support.

Thank you for keeping their path to freedom open.

Give today to help the next young raptor take flight.



*Above: These young owls were displaced from their nest, but RMRP’s adult foster parents stepped in to teach them all about being an owl.*



*Above: Fledglings at 2 months old and molting off their baby fluff.*

**Donate Today**



<https://www.rmrp.org/donate/>



*Above: This owl came in as a nestling, and after a few months in our care, passed flight and rat school with flying colors! Here, the owl is surveying the land before taking off from our soft release enclosure.*

# Gift Shop Merchandise

## Enamel Pins

Collect enamel pins of the fierce and feathered, and take the power of the skies with you—wherever you go!



## Stuffed Animals

Snuggle up with your favorite raptor. Big or small, we got them.

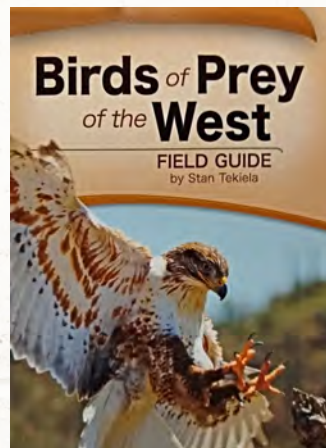
\$12+



## Books

From field guides to in-depth information about raptors, we have you covered. All books are great for learning and make great gifts for the holidays.

\$10 - \$22



Check Out Our Online Store!



<https://rocky-mountain-raptor-program.square.site/s/shop>

# Gift Shop Merchandise

## Greeting Cards

Send a little magic by mail! This enchanting set of 12 cards features artwork from RMRP's Galas, illustrated by our own Bonnie Cleaver. Perfect for holiday cheer or a note to brighten someone's day.

**\$20**



## T-Shirts

**\$25**

RMRP Exclusive design by our Educational Avian Coordinator, Bonnie Cleaver. Available in unisex crew neck cut, women's scoop necked, and women's v-neck cut.

Support wildlife education and look great doing it!

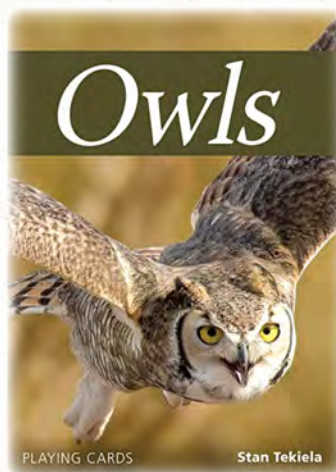


## Playing Cards

**\$11**

Deal some feathered fun! These playing cards feature stunning raptor or owl photos by famed photographer Stan Tekiela—perfect for game night and brushing up on your bird smarts. A wild little stocking stuffer!

## 2026 Calendar



## RMRP Gift Shop

RMRP Gift Shop open for holiday shopping!

**Monday - Friday  
9am - 5pm**

Please call (970) 484-7756 to confirm our elves are available to assist you.

# Education & Outreach

## What Makes a Great Education Ambassador?



**Above:** Our Education Volunteer, Abby, with Barley, our Swainson's Hawk Education Ambassador.

At the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program, we're honored to care for 19 incredible Education Ambassadors - non-releasable raptors who, despite their injuries, inspire thousands of people every year. Together, they help us reach the community more than 260 days each year, teaching the public about wildlife, conservation, and the power of second chances.

But not every raptor is suited for this special role. The best Ambassadors are calm and confident around people. They handle travel, new environments, and the buzz of crowds with ease. These traits come from a mix of natural temperament, early-life experiences, and gentle, choice-based training grounded in positive reinforcement and trust.

For others, human presence or handling causes too much stress - or their medical needs make participation unsafe or unkind. That's why RMRP carefully evaluates each potential Ambassador through behavioral observation, body language, and welfare assessments, ensuring only those who truly thrive in human care represent their wild counterparts.

Every one of our Ambassadors has a story—and together, they're helping people see raptors not just as birds, but as representatives of the patients we see and as vital sentinels for the natural world.

## Thank You, Exhibit Coordinators!

***The Rocky Mountain Raptor Program extends a heartfelt thank you to our incredible Exhibit Coordinators!***

Your dedication and passion made every event shine - from early-morning setups to connecting with thousands of curious visitors throughout the day. Because of your teamwork, our educational exhibits ran smoothly and created powerful, lasting connections between the public and our raptor ambassadors.

Thanks to your efforts, more than 35,000 people were left inspired to care for raptors and the wild places we all share!

RMRP extends a massive thank-you to Ash Perry, Kristal Domenico, Kristin Tallis, and Susan Baker for representing RMRP so beautifully, and to all our exceptional Education and Outreach volunteers who supported them this season. We honestly couldn't have done it without you!



## Aurora the Merlin: A Shining Light of Resilience

Aurora the Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) began her extraordinary journey in 2016 at Great Basin Wildlife Rescue in Utah, where she was found with a severely broken and infected left wing. To save her life, rescuers had to amputate part of the wing, leaving her without most of her primary flight feathers and unable to survive in the wild.



But Aurora's spirit proved unbreakable. She found a new purpose as an Educational Ambassador at The Urban Interface in Texas, quickly capturing hearts with her fierce personality and stunning beauty. When that organization closed in 2019, the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program was honored to be chosen as her new home. Thanks to Melinda Jordan, Don Dolce, and a generous donor, Aurora was flown to Fort Collins to begin her next chapter.

After settling in and learning new skills, she proudly debuted as an RMRP Ambassador in early 2020. Named for the northern lights her species might glimpse in their native range, Aurora continues to inspire awe and wonder wherever she goes—reminding us all of the resilience, grace, and wild beauty that defines raptors and the work we do to protect them.

# You're Invited!

## Rocky Mountain Raptor Program's 33rd Annual Gala is Soaring Your Way!

Get ready to spread your wings and party with the raptors! Our 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Gala is an unforgettable evening celebrating you and the thousands of magnificent birds you've helped rescue, heal, and release over 39 years of dedication to Northern Colorado's wild skies.

**What:** The most exciting raptor bash of the year!

**When:** February 28, 2026, 5 pm - 9 pm

**Where:** Colorado State University -  
Lory Student Center Ballroom



### TICKETS

**Early Bird** Nov 28, 2025 - Dec 31, 2025  
**Advanced Sale** Jan 01, 2026 - Feb 23, 2026

\$100 each

\$150 each

**Table of 8:** \$1,000 *Sit with your favorite people!*

**VIP Table of 8:** \$5,000 *See package on website for more information.*

*Seats are assigned before the event, so gather your flock and get a table.*

*Tickets will not be available at the door.*

### For Tickets & More Information

33<sup>rd</sup> Gala Homepage



[https://onecau.se/\\_d2wccq1](https://onecau.se/_d2wccq1)

**Email:** [lisa@rmrp.org](mailto:lisa@rmrp.org) **Phone:** (970) 484 - 7756

## Winter Wonderland Open House

At

## Rocky Mountain Raptor Program



December 13, 2025

12pm - 4pm

720 E. Vine Drive, Fort Collins



# Join In Our Mission

## 2025 Colorado Gives Day

### Early Giving Open Now!

Join the statewide movement and make an impact in your community. Colorado Gives Day starts now - connect with us!

From **November 1 through December 9**, every gift to RMRP will be boosted by a share of the \$1M+ Incentive Fund, thanks to the Colorado Gives Foundation and FirstBank. Your contribution, no matter the size, will make a difference and increase in value. The higher our funding total, the more incentive funding we'll receive.

AND, if you set up a new monthly donation, Colorado Gives Foundation will match your first monthly gift up to \$100! You can double your dollars and support our life-saving and life-changing mission.

Last year, Coloradoans gave more than \$54.8 million statewide, and RMRP received \$96,000. Help us prepare for 2026 and reach our 2025 goal of \$100,000!



### Fundraising Opportunity!

You can easily create your own Colorado Gives Day Fundraiser! Simply visit our Colorado Gives page and click the [Fundraise](#) button. Fill in your information and fundraising goals, and your fundraiser will be created automatically to share on your social media or via email.

The person who raises the most money on behalf of RMRP will receive a special Behind-the-Scenes tour and a 2026 RMRP Photo Calendar! It's a simple process already set up for you to start fundraising.

**#ColoradoGivesDay #MakeGoodHappen #BestDaytoGive**



## Other Ways To Help

### Outreach Inquiry



<https://www.rmrp.org/contact-us/educational-program-information-request/>

### Invite Raptors To Your Event

RMRP provides presentations and exhibits throughout the northeastern Colorado and southeastern Wyoming region, offering communities and individuals the opportunity to experience live raptors up close and learn about the uniqueness of these creatures and the habitats we share through personal connections and exploration.

### Give a Gift From Watson's Wish List

We celebrate your donations through our Educational Ambassador Golden Eagle Watson. Watson came to RMRP in 1994, and was an exemplary Ambassador for 30 years. By giving through Watson's Wish List, you honor his legacy by supporting wildlife conservation and rehabilitation efforts of RMRP.

### Watson's Wish List



<https://www.rmrp.org/wish-list-drive/>

## Year End Tax Benefits

### Make the Most of Year-End Giving and Tax Benefits

As the year draws to a close, many people take time to review their finances and charitable goals. Making a gift before December 31 not only supports the causes you care about, it can also provide valuable tax advantages.

Charitable contributions made by year's end may be deductible on your 2025 tax return, depending on your individual circumstances. Even if you don't itemize deductions, some types of gifts - such as appreciated stocks or distributions from certain retirement accounts - can offer additional benefits by reducing taxable income or capital gains.

For those age 70½ and older, a **Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)** from an IRA can be an especially smart way to give. A QCD counts toward your **Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)** and can be sent directly to the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program. This type of gift reduces your taxable income while helping rescue, rehabilitate, and release injured birds of prey across Colorado.

Before making your year-end gift, be sure to consult your financial or tax advisor to ensure you're making the most of the available opportunities.

Your generosity keeps our lifesaving and educational work soaring. Thank you for including the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program in your year-end giving plans!

For more information, contact Bob Francella at [bob@rmrp.org](mailto:bob@rmrp.org) or (970) 484 - 7756.

### RMRP ConnectHub



<https://linktr.ee/rockymountainraptorprogram>

### Like, Share, Support!

Follow RMRP on social media. Get the latest updates on our Education Ambassadors, raptors in care, upcoming events, and more!

Check out our **RMRP ConnectHub** to find us on social media.

**Facility Address:** 720 E Vine Dr, Fort Collins, CO 80524

**Phone:** (970) 484-7756

**Email:** [give@rmrp.org](mailto:give@rmrp.org)

**8 Mailing Address:** 2519 S. Shields Street, 1K-115, Fort Collins, CO 80526

**Raptor Rescue Hotline:** (970) 222-0322

**Website:** <https://www.rmrp.org/>

Photo by Erin Cunliffe