



**Rocky Mountain  
RAPTOR  
Program**  
a second chance at freedom  
Spring 2026 Newsletter

# ON THE Wing

## Thank You for a Record-Breaking Night!

We had such an incredible night at the 33rd Annual Gala! Over 430 of our friends came together at CSU's Lory Student Center and raised over \$200,000 for the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program. We want to extend our deepest gratitude to every member of the RMRP family for making the 2026 Gala a record-breaking and unforgettable night.

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Artwork by Bonnie Cleaver

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Baby Great Horned Owls from previous Baby Seasons.



## Baby Season Already!?

Our Rehabilitation team used to refer to late fall through early March as “slow season,” when we tackle tasks that have been relegated to “the November pile.” That includes facility repairs, end-of-year and other reports, and time to take a breath and take much-needed time off to replenish the soul. Slow season hasn’t been slow for the past few years, and it never materialized this winter as we dealt with a backlog of cases from last summer, a major roof project involving our flight complex, which shut down releases for a month, and a surge in cases for seasonal Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. Then, we started the year with several lead poisoning cases, which are always extremely challenging and resource-intensive. Throw in a change of personnel as Rehabilitation Director retired after 36 years - WHEW!!

Now, we’re settling in and ready for... baby season!? Great Horned Owls nest at the beginning of the year, and hatchlings start coming in spring, which is already upon us! Fuzzy, feisty, rage-filled mini-tigers of the sky usher in Baby Season 2026. -Mike, Research and Rehabilitation Coordinator

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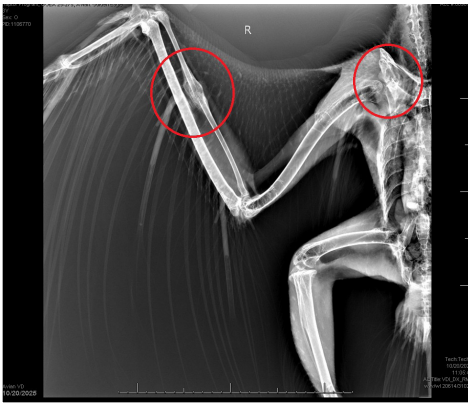
# Back to the Western Skies

*“I gotta be where I can see those Rocky Mountains, ride my horse and see an eagle fly”- Chris LeDoux*

Releasing a raptor back into the wild is the ultimate payoff for the efforts put forward by many. The chain of people needed to accomplish this is a strong one.

It starts with the reporting party who takes the time to make the initial phone call, then there is the rescuer with the skills to contain and transport the bird to our facility. This is followed by our skilled licensed rehabilitators, highly trained volunteers, interns, and support from the rest of our staff. The next link is our veterinarians at CSU, who provide us with guidance and high-quality medical care for these spectacular creatures.

Last, but not least, in this chain are our dedicated supporters who believe in our valuable work. We could not accomplish this mission without you. This life-saving chain is hardened and made complete by you.



This chain of dedicated people enabled an Adult Golden Eagle to get its Second Chance at Freedom in early February in its home territory near Stoneham, CO. The eagle came to us in mid-October of 2025, suffering from a healing fracture in the right shoulder (coracoid), right wing (radius), and a nasty wound associated with the wing fracture. One of the fractures was mostly healed, but we knew the wound would need plenty of treatment.



We took the eagle to the CSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital for radiographs to assess the fractures and the area near the wound. The prognosis for recovery was guarded, and we knew the road would be long and difficult, with no guarantee of success. But this eagle was tough and ready for the challenge - and so were we.

113 days later, the skies over the Pawnee grassland are a bit fuller.

*-Mike, Rehabilitation & Research Coordinator*



**Top:** Radiograph of the Golden Eagle's right wing. **Above:** The Golden Eagle with its wing bandaged.

**Above:** The Golden Eagle soaring away for a Second Chance at Freedom.

# Positive Reinforcement

## Putting Choice and Welfare First



Wild animals, especially solitary species like raptors, have no natural desire to interact with people or to please us as pets often do. In the early stages of training a new Ambassador raptor, the bird is often very nervous and fearful of humans. It then becomes our job to set that bird up for success in their new “career” with us.

When working with our Ambassador raptors, training isn't about control or forcing them to do what we want. Instead, it's about developing and maintaining positive relationships between the birds and our staff and volunteers who work with them every day. That's why positive reinforcement training is the foundation for everything we do.

Positive reinforcement means adding a reward (something the bird naturally values, such as food) when they perform behaviors we

want to see more of. These behaviors can include: sitting calmly while we clean their enclosure, voluntarily stepping onto the glove or scale, calmly entering a travel box, sitting calmly in front of a large audience, or flying to the glove. Over time, these routines become more consistent, and the bird grows more skilled and confident. They learn that humans are safe, predictable, and rewarding to interact with, making it easier to introduce new situations and behaviors over time.

Some days, an Ambassador raptor may not feel motivated or enthusiastic about working with people, and that's okay! It's our responsibility as trainers and caretakers to recognize those off days and ensure that nothing is amiss



**Above:** Educational Ambassadors Flint (American Kestrel) and Tycho (Eastern Screech Owl) being rewarded with food treats during a painting session.

and that their needs are being met.

Positive reinforcement training also supports better husbandry and medical care. Routine behaviors such as administering medications, weighing, eye exams, foot checks, and body condition assessments can be performed without restraining the bird, allowing us to perform these checks more frequently without causing additional stress.

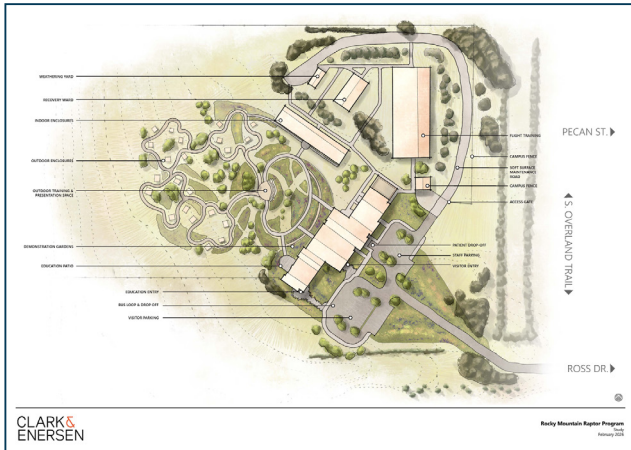
We also recognize that behavior training is an evolving practice. Our team actively networks with other reputable wildlife and education organizations, sharing knowledge and learning from colleagues in the field. This ongoing collaboration helps us continually refine our standards and practices and provide the best possible care for our Ambassador raptors.

*-Bonnie, Education Avian Coordinator*

**Right:** Educational Ambassador Tycho (Eastern Screech Owl) weighing himself.



# Flying into the Future



One of the most exciting things we shared at our gala was a peek into the future! Gala attendees got the first look at concept renderings of our future facility at the former Hughes Stadium and learned about the next steps to make our dreams of a nature center a reality.

After the passage of ballot measure 2H last fall, RMRP is working with collaborating organization Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and the City of Fort Collins to negotiate the partnership and terms to secure our place in the future of the Hughes property.

The initial steps of many are underway, and we can't wait to grow with you. Stay tuned for more information about our future facility.

Thank you to Clark & Enersen for working with us to create these incredible concept renderings!

**Top:** Concept site plan for our future facility. **Bottom:** Concept rendering of the front of our future facility, including the main building and outdoor amphitheater for educational programming.



## Spring Birds of Prey Class Series

Keep an eye out for more information on our upcoming virtual Birds of Prey class series to discover their incredible adaptations, natural history, and how to identify these amazing raptors, all from the comfort of your own home!

Class 1: June 6 | Class 2: June 13 | Class 3: June 20

## It's Calendar Photo Contest Time! Wanted: Great Photos of Birds of Prey

Do you have a great raptor photo? Would you like to share it with the whole world? You can do that by entering our annual Photo Calendar Contest! Photographers of all levels are encouraged to apply. The top 13 photographs will be featured as monthly photos in our 2027 Calendar, along with many other photos. The first-place winner's photo will be featured on the cover.

All photographs will include photo credits. Deadline to enter is **June 1, 2026**. Scan the QR code or visit [rmrp.org/CalendarSubmit](https://rmrp.org/CalendarSubmit) to learn more!



## Your Giving Keeps Us Going

Your financial support sustains our life-saving raptor rehabilitation and conservation education efforts. Thank you for your generosity!



[rmrp.org/donate](https://rmrp.org/donate)

## Upcoming Events

- May 9 Spring Open House @ RMRP
- May 23-25 Boulder Creek Festival @ Boulder Creek
- July 11-12 Steamboat Art in the Park @ West Lincoln Park
- Aug. 8-9 Loveland Art in the Park @ North Lake Park

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