



The Community Raptorwatch Project

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INTRODUCTION

Raptors are birds that are commonly known for their predatory habits. Thus they are referred to as birds of prey. Raptors are characterized by a hooked beak, sharp talons and keen sensory abilities, like a strong sense of smell, and exquisite vision. Raptors can be found all across the world, and 23 of them can be found in Connecticut. Raptors face many human threats, such as habitat loss, poisoning.

One of the most important parts of conservation is education, so I have created a project to get people outside and interested in raptors, while collecting data to track raptor sightings throughout Connecticut and neighboring states. Using this data we can track migration, assess population, pinpoint raptor hotspots throughout Connecticut, and get the community involved all at the same time.

Raptors can often be found circling where fields meet forests, as these are one of ideal hunting grounds for most raptors. Most raptor species prefer forested land for nesting, although the type of forest varies by species. State parks are often a great spot to see hawk species.

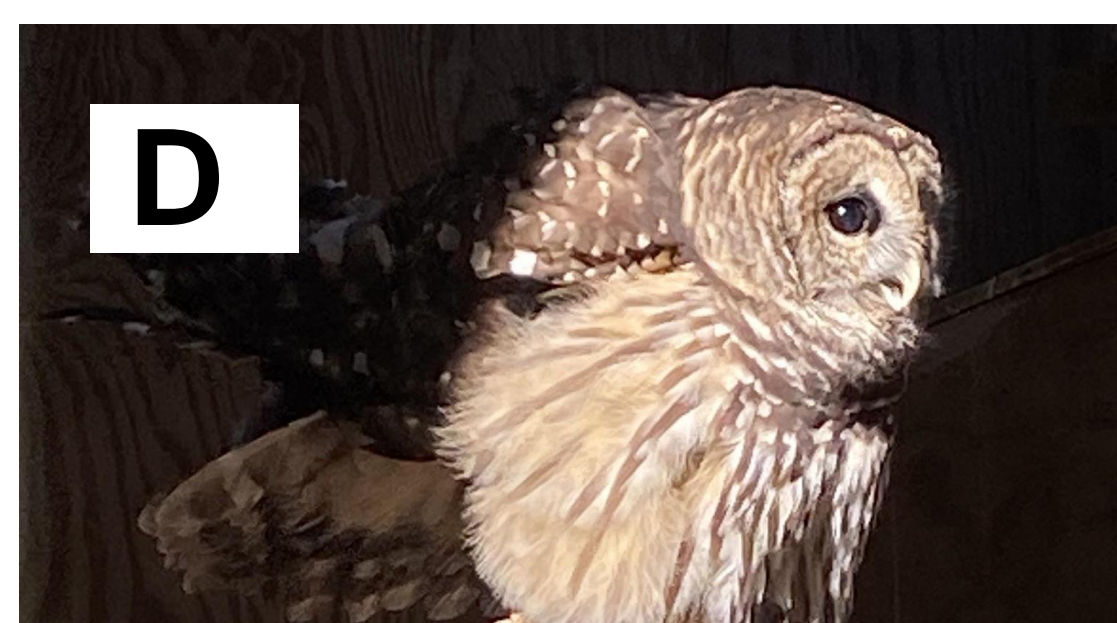


Fig 1. Roy and Margot Larsen Wildlife Sanctuary, Fairfield, CT
(A) Kayla, Red-shouldered hawk. (B) Dante the Black turkey vulture, with his feeding enrichment toy (C) Astrid and (D) Barred owl

PROJECT COMPONENT 1: RAPTOR SURVEY

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Researched:

- raptor species in Connecticut
- raptor viewing sites in Connecticut
- places to see raptors in captivity

Created:

- an Epicollect5 survey
- a story map with information about the Epicollect5 survey, along with educational sources, to teach about raptors
- social media postings for my community
- data collection file, compiling data into a map, and creating a list of findings/discoveries.
- separate maps to track migration (long term), pinpoint raptor hotspots, track population (long term) to publish for the public

RAPTOR REHABILITATION and ENRICHMENT

Many raptors are injured and brought into rehabilitation centers. Some of these birds heal and are released and others heal, but have injuries that prevent them from going back to the wild, so where do these birds go? Usually they go to sanctuaries and some become educational birds.

One of the problems of having birds in captivity is that they are not used to being in small enclosures. Oftentimes, if birds are not stimulated and are only given the bare necessities, their physical and mental health can suffer. When this happens the bird will be less active, lose interest in food, stop preening and more. Not only is this not good for the bird, but it can create misconceptions about raptors.

It's much more memorable to go to a sanctuary and see a raptor preening, eating, making calls, and hopping around exploring. So how do we keep captive raptors in good physical and mental health? One common way is to create enrichment for the bird. Enrichment is creating environmental stimuli. Just as you give a child some toys and puzzles to sharpen their senses, you can do the same thing with raptors and other animals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PROJECT COMPONENT 2: RAPTOR ENRICHMENT MATERIALS AND METHODS

- Researched raptor enrichment
- Bought materials (dog toy)
- List normal behaviors for each bird
- Introduced Dante (Black turkey vulture) and Kayla (Red-shouldered hawk) to enrichment toys
- Fed Dante and Kayla every day for a month using enrichment toys
- Analyzed and compared normal behaviors to behaviors after enrichment

RESULTS

Kayla (Red-shouldered hawk)

- Enrichment toy:
- Kayla's first reaction to the enrichment toy was to fly away from it. She was fearful of it; this was not a normal behavior for her.
- We did not continue using the enrichment toy.

Dante (Black turkey vulture)

- Enrichment toy:
- Dante, when introduced to the enrichment toy, was timid around it. After two to three days, he had gotten used to it and would eat out of it.
- After three weeks of enrichment using a dog toy, Dante's behaviors hadn't changed.

Click the following link to learn more about the Community Raptorwatch Project

<https://arcr.is/1fDuLT>



Fig 2. Enrichment toys

CONCLUSION

Enrichment is one way to showcase raptors' incredible adaptations. And through data collection, we can enable even more people to view raptors in their natural habitat.

Educating and inspiring people through interactive experiences is one of the most efficient ways to raise awareness, and to help protect raptors. My hope is that by helping people to see raptors' true brilliance, in the wild and in captivity, people will become invested in, and excited about, protecting them!