



Conservation Education, Avian Research, Raptor Rescue & Collaboration with Others



How Do Our School Gardens Grow?

by Heather Rissi

Education Coordinator/Writer

For our Living with the Landscape (LWL) schools, the pollinator garden is the 5th grade students' introduction to Hawks Aloft. Why would a non-profit that specializes in birds of prey bother with pollinator gardens? According to the USDA, 80 percent of all flowering plants require pollination. So, if pollinators disappeared, the entire food chain would be decimated or at the very least, there would be many devastating effects. Giving students the knowledge of where flowers and their food come from gives them a larger stake in making positive changes to their environment, while bringing plants to their schools allows them to take an active role in changing their school's habitats.

Creating school pollinator gardens does have limitations, however. First and foremost, we have found that school staff often struggle to provide water for the plants throughout the

sweltering Albuquerque summer when schools are vacated. Second, they often lack the resources to buy plants, soil, or other necessary tools (i.e. shovels, gardening gloves).

In order to alleviate some of those issues, this year we partnered with [Pollinators in the Neighborhood](#) (PIN) to come up with a plan for each of our LWL elementary schools (Alvarado, Kit Carson, Sombra del Monte, and Reginald Chavez). PIN is instrumental in providing pesticide-free native pollinator plants to schools and neighborhoods throughout Albuquerque. This year they provided the schools with lesson plans on pollinators and visited each school campus alongside our educators to determine planting sites and limitations. After careful consideration and planning, PIN decided to provide three of our participating schools, with plants, soil, and even some gardening beds. And together, we made a new plan for the fourth school, Reginald Chavez.

Reginald Chavez had some watering and landscaping issues; therefore, we decided to create a student pollinator garden at [Old Town Farm](#) (who hosts us for our end-of-the-year field trips)! Unfortunately, due to time constraints, students were unable to help create the garden, but PIN and Hawks Aloft staff and family showed up in October to pull weeds, lay out hose irrigation, and plant the garden! The goal is to provide students from Reginald Chavez (which is within walking distance to the farm), as well as other visitors, a space to sit and enjoy the native plants and the pollinators that visit them!

We couldn't be happier to see how the gardens turned out. It was fantastic to watch students at work, fetching soil and mulch, digging holes, and gently patting the soil around their newly planted perennials before moving on to the next. Students with previous planting knowledge were instrumental in helping teach their classmates. Students were encouraged to care for the plants throughout the school year, and report back to us about the different types of pollinators they observe visiting their plants. We cannot wait to hear what they have to tell us.

We gladly thank Elizabeth Reed and Mima Falk of Pollinators in the Neighborhood for their assistance with this important project, and we also thank Old Town Farm for allowing us to once again use their property to create a pollinator garden for Reginald Chavez Elementary School. We are grateful for these fantastic partnerships.

We also thank the funders who make LWL possible: [Nusenda Credit Union](#), [PNM Foundation](#), [FHL Foundation](#), [Albuquerque Community Foundation](#) and private donors.



Photos by HAI Staff.



Thank you to each of our funders for your ongoing support!
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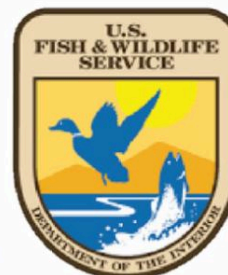
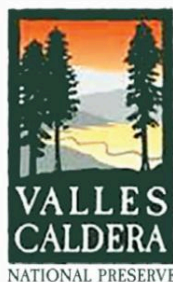
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Migration Mishaps

**By Gail Garber
Executive Director**

Migration is a hazardous undertaking for all animals, particularly for raptors that travel between hemispheres as well as those that travel shorter distances. Survival rates for migrating raptors vary widely by species, age, and other factors, but juveniles generally have lower survival rates than adults, and annual survival can range from 45% to over 94%.

Body size, experience, and exposure to threats during migration significantly impact survival. For example, smaller raptors have lower annual survival rates (60–70% for adults), while larger raptors have rates over 90%. First-year birds are more vulnerable due to inexperience, reduced hunting expertise, and a higher risk of predation. Further anthropogenic factors, such as habitat alteration and collisions with vehicles and windows can significantly decrease survival rates, as evidenced by the species that find their way to us.

Based on the Hawks Aloft Raptor Rescue patient load, fall migration results in the intakes of species that are normally not present year-round. It differs every year in both seasonality and species. In the fall of 2024, we received several small owls, from [Northern Saw-whet Owls](#) and [Long-eared Owls](#) in addition to the more numerous [Western Screech-Owls](#).

Young hawks and falcons, recently independent from their parents are the most vulnerable, as evidenced by our late summer/early fall 2025 patients:

- [Mississippi Kite](#) fledgling: Sept. 9 with a wing fracture of the radius and ulna. The bones were not pinnable and treatment consisted of wing wraps to hold the bones in good alignment. Clearly, she missed the migration window so will be with us throughout the winter months and may not be releasable. Treated by Dr. Kariana Atkinson at [Petroglyph Animal Hospital](#).



- [Swainson's Hawk](#) fledgling: Sept. 16 with only a large scab near the elbow joint of one wing. Dr. Kari cleaned and debrided the wound and stitched it up. The hawk recovered full range of motion in the wing following antibiotic treatment, but he also missed the migration window and will be with us throughout the winter.

- [Prairie Falcon](#) adult female: Sept. 29 with a torn lower eyelid and open wound on her left wing along with a fractured radius. Dr. Chris Fiorello, cleaned and debrided the wound, wrapped the wing and stitched the eyelid at [Northwest Animal Clinic & Hospital](#). Dr. Chris and Vaughn Herrera continue to do laser therapy at [Roadrunner Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Hospital](#) on the falcon to facilitate range of motion in the wing. She will be with us indefinitely.



- [Great Horned Owl](#): Oct. 1 from the [Navajo Nation Zoological Park](#) with a wing fracture and a blown-out eye. Dr Kari pinned the wing and, after consult with our veterinary team determined that it could be released if the owl regained full flight and the damaged eye removed. It is now flying in our eagle flight cage.

- Northern Saw-whet Owl: Oct. 14 with a laceration above the eye and a soft tissue injury to the shoulder.

- Western Screech-Owl: Oct. 11 found in the middle of NM 14 in Sandia Park. Examined by Dr. Chris at Northwest Animal Hospital, no fractures found. It was placed in our outdoor flight cage with other Western Screech-Owls and owl is scheduled for release on Nov. 9.

- [Merlin](#): Oct. 23 with a fracture to the humerus near the elbow, a non-repairable fracture. It was humanely euthanized.

- [Burrowing Owl](#): Oct. 28. This owl was hit by a vehicle and died within 24 hours.

- [American Goshawk](#) fledgling: Oct. 30. Found in a yard in Placitas, this young hawk had several cactus spines embedded in his body and feet, but X-rays revealed no fractures. He is being treated by Dr. Chris prophylactically for potential diseases and will be passed on to a falconer for flight and hunting pre-release training.

- Great Horned Owl: October 31 from Navajo Nation Zoo, had been hit by a car with a fracture to the elbow. This owl was humanely euthanized.

Whew! It has been one busy fall chock full of birds we rarely encounter. Please say prayers for them all.

Photos by HAI Staff. Top photo: Dr. Kariana Atkinson and Heather Rissi examine the Mississippi Kite. Center photo: Dr. Christine Fiorello examines the Northern Goshawk. Bottom photo: Prairie Falcon in rehabilitation.



OOPS! We Apologize! Volunteer Training Class Error

Unfortunately, the store on our website ceased to send notifications of sales and registrations for our Volunteer Training Class in early October. We wondered why so few potential new volunteers had signed up, but dutifully canceled the class with only 4 registered participants, only to learn today that people had tried to register but we never got the message. We apologize for the error.

We will hold another Volunteer Orientation in February 2026.



Raptor Surveys at the El Segundo and Lee Ranch Mines - 2025

**By Trevor Fetz, Ph.D
Research Director**

Since 2006, Hawks Aloft has conducted raptor and [Common Raven](#) monitoring surveys at Peabody Natural Resources Company, El Segundo Coal

Mine in McKinley County. In 2024, Peabody expanded our contract to include the adjacent Lee Ranch Coal Mine. Surface coal mines in New Mexico are required to conduct annual surveys to monitor the reproductive success of breeding raptors in order to evaluate the environmental impacts of mining. Raven nests also are monitored as a component of this project because ravens build stick nests that often are used in subsequent years by nesting raptors and because they regularly utilize abandoned raptor nests for breeding. Since 2019, Larry Rimer has been the manager of this project, and he managed the surveys at both mines in 2024 and 2025.

Over the course of this study at El Segundo, eight different raptor species have been documented breeding in the mine permit area and its associated two-mile buffer zone. These nesting species include, in descending order of nesting abundance, [American Kestrel](#), [Ferruginous Hawk](#), Burrowing Owl, [Red-tailed Hawk](#), [Golden Eagle](#), Great Horned Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Prairie Falcon. In 2025, Larry documented 10 active raptor nests, including Red-tailed Hawk (3), American Kestrel (2), Burrowing Owl (2), Ferruginous Hawk (2), and Golden Eagle (1). The nesting outcome was determined at eight of the 10 nests, with seven nests successfully fledging young. Two successful Red-tailed Hawk nests fledged five total young, two Ferruginous Hawk nests fledged four total young, one Burrowing Owl nest fledged three young, one American Kestrel nest fledged two young, and the lone Golden Eagle nest fledged one offspring. One Red-tailed Hawk nest failed, and the outcome could not be determined at one American Kestrel nest and one Burrowing Owl nest. In addition, Larry documented three active Common Raven

nests. All three raven nests were successful and fledged a total of 11 young. [Northern Harrier](#), Prairie Falcon, Swainson's Hawk, and [Turkey Vulture](#) also were documented in the El Segundo survey area in 2025, but no evidence of occupied territories or nesting was observed.

Very little raptor activity was documented in 2025 at the Lee Ranch Mine, which is situated in a much more barren landscape than El Segundo. Larry documented two active American Kestrel nests and two active Common Raven nests in the Lee Ranch survey area. One of the kestrel nests fledged five young, but the outcome could not be determined at the other nest. Both raven nests were successful, fledging a total of seven young. A single, active Burrowing Owl territory was located, but no evidence of nesting was documented. Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Red-tailed Hawk, and Turkey Vulture also were observed at least once in the Lee Ranch survey area in 2025, but no evidence of occupied territories or nesting was observed.

As always, we are grateful for Larry's efforts in overseeing this project, with the assistance of Liz Roberts.

Golden Eagle and Ferruginous Hawk Active Nests. Photos by Larry Rimer.

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The Flight of the Hyacinth Macaw

**By Gail Garber
Executive Director**



In October 2025, 10 intrepid adventurers traveled with Hawks Aloft and Holbrook Travel to the Pantanal, Brazil, the largest tropical wetland in the world. We just returned a few days ago and have not yet had time to process our images from the ecotourism trip. Watch for a special feature article about the wonders of this part of the planet in your December issue.

One of the animals I most hoped to see was the [Hyacinth Macaw](#) and we were not disappointed. Responsible ecotourism reinforces conservation efforts in the Pantanal, as evidenced during our expedition where conservation efforts for Hyacinth Macaw and other species were particularly evident at some lodges, particularly Pousada Aguape in South Pantanal, where feeders attracted large numbers of hungry hyacinths as well as other species of parrots and macaws.

Once widely distributed through central Brazil, with small numbers in Bolivia and Paraguay, the Hyacinth Macaw is now limited to the Pará, Gerais and Pantanal regions of Brazil and marginally in Bolivia and Paraguay. It is listed as a Vulnerable, CITES 1 species and as endangered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service too. Native forests have been replaced by crops and cattle ranches, creating a shortage in nesting sites, increasing competition further reducing population size. The hyacinth's specialized diet makes them particularly vulnerable from the reduced availability of food resources resulting from habitat loss.

Hyacinth Macaw was reduced to an estimated 3,000 birds by massive illegal trade in the period from 1970–1990, with possibly as many as 10,000 being taken from the wild in the 1980s alone. In 1987, the species was placed on Appendix I of CITES, but this only stimulated greater demand. Their remaining stronghold is the Pantanal, where range has expanded and the population has shown signs of recovery since 1990, probably as a result of conservation projects. In contrast, populations in east Amazonia and the Gerais have continued to decline, from an estimated 1,500 individuals in 1986 to 1,000 in 2003. In the 1990s several long-term studies coupled with conservation initiatives began, often involving ecotourism, environmental education and nest-box deployment, at certain ranches in the Pantanal. However, local trapping for feathers and food may persist, as well as destruction of nest-sites either for farming or to obtain birds, as well as general habitat loss throughout the species' range continues to decrease its survival prospects.

Our group was fortunate to be able to witness these macaws as well as other amazing birds, reptiles and mammals throughout our visit. Stay tuned for more information next month.

Hyacinth Macaw photos by Gail Garber.



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Last Chance for Raffle Tickets!

The Winning Ticket will be drawn on Saturday Dec. 6

[Click here to purchase tickets.](#)

The drawing will take place on the first Saturday of December 2025!

Photo by Bob McInteer.

Hawks Aloft International Tours



Belize | Neotropical Birds and Mayan

Ruins

April 16, 2026 - April 21, 2026

\$2675 per person

Embark on an exploration of rainforests, waterfalls, history and wildlife with Hawks Aloft and Holbrook Travel. On this 6-day adventure you will visit national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and learn about local conservation and Mayan sites. Amid rainforests and valleys, archaeological sites tell the story of this culturally rich region while also providing habitat for a diversity of flora and fauna, including hundreds of bird species. You'll encounter incredible biodiversity and geological features in the country's pristine central rainforests and learn about wildlife rehabilitation at the Belize Zoo.

OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION: Continue your Belize adventure with an optional post-trip extension to explore and snorkel in the azure waters of Ambergris Caye.

Highlights

- Discover concentrated flocks as well as rare sightings of avifauna, such as the Jabiru, Yellow-headed Parrot, Yucatan Jay, and Yucatan Woodpecker, in the wetlands and pine savannas of Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Hike the trails at Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Refuge, a tropical moist forest sheltering some 300 avian species, including trogons, tanagers, flycatchers, and the Yellow-billed Cacique.
- Enjoy up-close encounters with some of the country's native fauna, including a pair of Harpy Eagles, at the Belize Zoo.
- Learn about birding and conservation in Belize from a local expert
- Explore Mayan sites and beautiful waterfalls at Mayflower Bocawina National Park via a system of trails through the rainforest.

Click [Here](#) for complete details including post-trip extension.

Photo Credits: Top Collage (clockwise from upper left) [Ocellated Turkey](#) by Laura Hare; [Xunantunich](#) by Lily Wilde, [King Vulture](#) (Holbrook stock) [Southern Stingrays](#) by Steffie

Peru Spectacles of Nature Birding the Amazonia, Andes, and Desert Coast



September 15- 27, 2026
\$7275 Per person

From the snow-peaked Andes Mountains to arid desert lowlands, and from steamy cloud forests to sun-kissed Pacific shores, Peru's tremendous range of ecosystems and the consequent diversity of its endemic species make it a favorite among birders. Join Gail Garber, Holbrook Travel, and Hawks Aloft members for a unique birding opportunity and to explore some of the

country's natural and cultural highlights—including the Amazon basin, [Machu Picchu](#), and the [Ballestas Islands](#). As you traverse different landscapes, you'll cross more than just birds off your life list: take a boat ride through the rainforest on the Amazon River, walk among the ruins of the Inca civilization, and marvel at the coastal desert of the [Paracas Reserve](#).



Highlights

- Spot some of the 400-plus species of birds found in the Machu Picchu complex and surrounding areas.
- Explore the Amazonian lowlands by boat and on foot to look for colorful macaws, tanagers, and the enigmatic [Hoatzin](#).
- Discover the mist-fed ecosystem of Lomas de Lachay, home to an oasis of dwarf forest in the Peruvian desert.
- Visit Pantanos de Villa, a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance that provides critical habitat for waterfowl and migratory shorebirds.

- Witness the seabirds of Ballestas Islands, including species such as the [Humboldt Penguin](#), [Peruvian Booby](#), [Inca Tern](#), and the near-threatened [Peruvian Diving-Petrel](#).

Click [here](#) for complete details and for registration.

Photos: Top Photo clockwise from top right: [Paradise Tanager](#)/Ian Segebarth, Hoatzin/Holbrook stock, Machu Picchu/Debbie Sturdivant Jordan/Weaving demonstration/Laura Hare. [Andean Cock of the Rock](#) by Ian Segebarth.

Hawks Aloft Waitlisted Tours.

Please visit our website for full details and to be added to the waitlist.



Cuba A Journey to the Extraordinary

January 31 – February 9, 2026

From \$4,295/person

[Click Here for complete details and for registration information.](#)

[Western Spindalis](#), image courtesy of Holbrook Travel.

Hawks Aloft Merchandise



T-shirts (both long and short-sleeved) are \$30 and can be ordered on our website or can be picked up at the office. Ladies sizes are available in short sleeves; all long-sleeved shirts are unisex, and we also have youth sizes in short sleeves available for \$25.

[Order yours today!](#)

**Donate Your Old Car
to Hawks Aloft!**



Your old car might just be taking up space in your garage--but it could make a huge difference in the lives of New Mexico's native birds, natural landscapes, and the many people who delight in these things.

Car donation is simple. And in fact, it might just make your life *easier*.

[Donate your old vehicle](#)

Call our office if you have questions:

505-828-9455.

Thank you,
One Community Auto!



Support Hawks Aloft by Shopping at Smith's

Many of you have long been Hawks Aloft supporters, and a good number of you have also been longtime Smith's shoppers. For those not in the know, the grocery chain has a program that provides a small kick-back quarterly to nonprofits when their supporters link their shopper's cards to the organization.



The company recently changed their policies regarding the program; so even if you've signed up in the past, you may need to do it again! The good news is that it is easy to do so.

1. Go to [Smith's Foods](#)
2. Either create an account or sign-in to an existing one
3. Once logged in, click on "**Account Summary**" on the left sidebar
4. From there, scroll down to "**Inspiring Donations Program**" and click "**Enroll**"
5. A searchable list will come up, you can either search for "**Hawks Aloft**" or enter our ID number for the program, "**GL430**."
6. Shop using your card and know that every time you do, you help out Hawks Aloft!

We appreciate your ongoing support in this and so many other capacities!

Adopt A Raptor

Meet Sunny! The Prairie Falcon

Sunny arrived at Hawks Aloft in 2013 with a badly damaged left wingtip. The wingtip was hanging by a thread and had to be amputated at the last digit by veterinarians. We are not

sure how he was injured, but he was discovered by a pair of young hikers in the desert, one of whom was a veterinary technician and carried Sunny to the safety of a clinic. He appeared to be a juvenile at that time, so we suspect he was hatched in 2012. This would make him 13 this year! While there have been known individual birds that make it into the double digits, wild Prairie Falcons tend to have a life expectancy of just 2-5 years!

Sunny is named for his bright yellow feet and the dark malar stripes that protect his eyes by absorbing the sun's glare - a vital adaptation for a species that hunts during the daylight hours. Like all falcons, Sunny has remarkable head stabilization, along with a considerable talent for showing off this trait during education programs.

Please consider adopting this amazing ambassador bird!

When you adopt a Hawks Aloft raptor you receive:

- A one-year Hawks Aloft membership
- An adoption certificate
- An information booklet about the individual bird you have adopted
- Exclusive access to video updates about your bird
- Your choice of:

A professional 8×10 photo of your bird, or

A stuffed Audubon Bird with realistic vocalizations (if available for that species)



[Click here to learn more about our Avian Ambassadors](#)

Photo by Larry Rimer



Photographer's Monthly Gallery

Andrew Orr

Andy began working with Hawks Aloft in 2024, contributing GIS support and gaining a deeper appreciation for the organization's raptor studies. Before that, he volunteered with the [Peregrine Fund's California Condor](#) reintroduction project in northern Arizona, where his passion for wildlife photography grew through documenting one of North America's largest and most endangered birds, the [California Condor](#). The photographs in this series were taken during his time with the

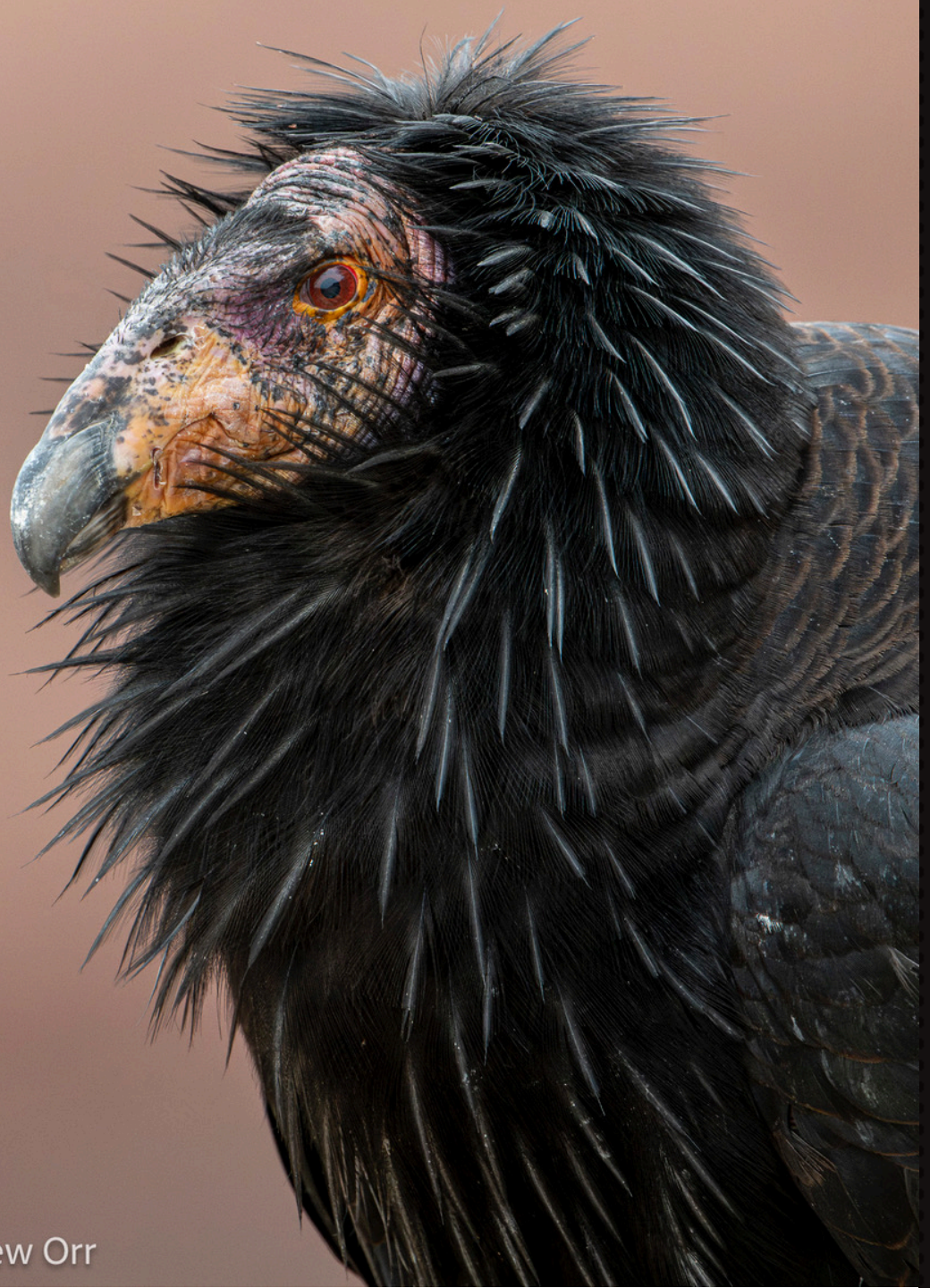
condor project, captured moments that reflect both the bird's power and its fragility.

In addition to raptor photography, Andy enjoys large-format film photography, scuba diving, and caving. He works full-time as a GIS analyst at Argonne National Laboratory. You can see more of his photography at www.andrew-orr.com or on Instagram at [@andrew_orr_photo](#)

Click [Here](#) to Visit Andrew Orr Photography



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Matt Mitchell

Raptor Rescue Calls and Patient Intakes October 2025

Hotline Calls: 45
Patient intakes: 13

- Great Horned Owl,
Wing & Eye Injury
- Swainson's Hawk,
Open Fracture
(juvenile)
- Turkey Vulture,
Gunshot
- Cooper's Hawk,
Spinal Injury
- Western Screech Owl,
Neurologic Disease &
Physical Injury

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 Northwest Animal Clinic & Hospital

- Cooper's Hawk, Neurologic Disease & Physical Injury
- Northern Saw-whet Owl, Puncture Wound
- Common Poorwill, Head Trauma
- Western Screech Owl, Emaciation & Eye Injury
- Merlin, Hit by Car
- Burrowing Owl, Died in 24 Hrs
- Northern Goshawk, Physical Injury (juvenile)
- Great Horned Owl, Wing Fracture @ Elbow Joint

Would you like to join our team of recurring monthly donors? Every little bit helps, even if its only \$5 a month. [Contact Gail](#) to set up your recurring monthly donation.

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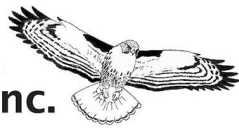
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