

Raptor Tails, Chapter 2: Raptor Rescue in northern California



by Defiance Canyon Raptor Rescue

Community (This content is not subject to review by Daily Kos staff prior to publication.)

Follow

View Profile

© Tuesday, January 25, 2022 at 9:31:10a PST

★ Recommend Story 22

Share



An adult bald eagle at his nest with a 10 week old nestling, pre-first flight (fledge). Defiance Canyon Raptor Rescue rescues and rehabilitates eagles, hawks, owls, and falcons in rural counties in northern California.

It has been raining eagles since December here at Defiance Canyon Raptor Rescue. Water rain is a life-giving wonderful thing...raining eagles, not so good.

Usually we get about 5 injured eagles a year, although in 2020, we received 10. In the past 2 months we have received rescue calls for 5 bald eagles and 1 golden eagle.

Yesterday the call was for a golden eagle, who turned out to be a first year bald eagle. Most people don't realize that bald eagles don't look like the white headed and tailed bird that is standard in photos until they are 5 years old. First year bald eagles are mostly brown with random white splotches that can be seen in flight. Second and third year birds are mottled brown and white. Fourth years start to get white heads and tails. Bald eagles have larger beaks than golden eagles. Their beaks and eyes are dark to begin with, gradually turning to yellow. Goldens' eyes and beaks stay darker.

Yesterday's young male eagle was in a agricultural area near Corning in Tehama County. Weirdly, he was on Samson Avenue, the same name as the nearest road in a different town where the shot eagle Delilah was found last week (**Chapter 1**).

"Samson" is a strong name, which will hopefully mean he is a strong enough to survive.

There seems to be some universal rule that injured eagles are usually near barb wire fences. Rescuing Samson required getting through rusty fences 4 times, 2 times while carrying him, and kneeling in a cow pie to remove the net that he was caught with. Luckily, the cow pie was dry. Ahh...the glamorous life of raptor rescue!



First year golden eagle. The white band in the tail disappears with age. Note the light colored head and neck feathers.

Sampson is very thin and has a fracture near his wrist in his left wing. He was transported to the raptor specialist veterinarian late yesterday. He has many problems to overcome. He was brave, yet cooperative when being handled.

Last week, someone commented that they didn't realize eagles were raptors. Let's put it in "R" here and back up. The word "raptor" is from the Latin word "rapere" meaning "to seize". They have very strong feet that can exert hundreds of pounds of pressure. In falconry, it's called "footing" when a raptor tries (or does) grab a person with their foot...something we rehabbers reeally try to avoid. Raptors, also called birds of prey, are eagles, hawks, owls, falcons and are obligate carnivores who hunt and feed on captured mammals, smaller birds, insects, and carrion (dead folks). Turkey vultures, who don't hunt live prey, are generally lumped in with raptors, but do not have strong feet to grab with. Rather their beaks are very strong, to tear with. Trust me, you don't want to get bitten by a turkey vulture--they don't just bite, but twist also, which leaves an impressive, rainbow colored bruise on a person. Many people are repulsed by vultures, but they are an important part of nature's cleanup crew...and those people should think about how they go into a grocery store and buy dead meat wrapped in plastic. It didn't come from a side of the road, but...

When you see a raptor, you are seeing a much smaller, evolved and adapted version of a dinosaur. The bones of an ancient ancestor of the golden eagles was discovered in the La Brea Tar Pits.

To recap: People often focus on individual species, but we believe every species is important, whether it is on a man-made list or not. Habitat fragmentation and loss have significant impacts on wildlife. We work to rescue, rehabilitate, and return raptors to their wild lives, along with our work to protect watersheds and forests of California.



4th year bald eagle (top), 3rd year bald eagle (bottom)



Bald eagles' legs are feathered to above their ankles (think Capri pants)

Our website is here: [wildlife rescue](#)

There are about 100 wildlife rehabilitators in California. Not all rescue raptors. We have the only eagle permit for the northern California counties of Shasta, Tehama, Trinity, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Glenn, and Butte.

Wildlife rehabilitation requires permits from both the Federal and State Departments of Fish and Wildlife. Most funding for rehab comes from individuals, and there are very few paid jobs in rehab, except in more populous areas with a strong community of donors. Personally, it's a labor of love and responsibility for those who are



Golden eagles have feathered legs all the way to their toes.

often injured by human actions—vehicles, bullets, toxic chemicals and on and on.

