



EARTH DAY

BIRDS

on the Mend

Eugene resident Louise Shimmel nurtures ill and injured birds of prey

By Natasha Shepard
Entertainment Reporter

When Stinky the Great Horned Owl arrived, he had been "at the business end of a skunk."

His smell permeated the Cascades Raptor Center — even at long range — and continued to do so for his entire stay at the center.

But his onerous odor wasn't his only problem when Raptor Center Director Louise Shimmel picked him up in Albany, halfway between his home in Stayton and the center in Eugene.

Stinky had wounds on both his feet, was underweight, and, of course, he smelled very bad.

But thanks to some quick and — because of Stinky's ability to remove his bandages — creative work from the Raptor Center, the owl was set free only five months later.

Stinky is one of the 1,000 raptors the Cascades Raptor Center has helped since its beginnings in 1987.

According to Raptor Center Director Louise Shimmel, the center has two goals: to rehabilitate and release injured and orphaned birds of prey, and to educate the public about respecting all wildlife — so that fewer of the birds will have to come to the rehabilitation center.

Basically, raptors are birds of prey that hunt with their feet rather than with their beaks. These birds include falcons, hawks, osprey and owls.

At any one time, there may be as many as 50 birds at the center, Shimmel said.

People from all walks of life bring the birds in, and the injuries are almost as diverse. While about one-third of the injuries the center sees are from bird-car collisions, other common injuries are collisions with windows, shootings, poisonings and young birds falling out of nests.

The center once received several reports of a hawk that had been shot through with an arrow but was still flying and hunting.

The center rehabilitates and releases many birds each year, but not every bird is as lucky as Stinky.

"We euthanize more than we'd like to," Shimmel said.

But that's why the education part of the program



ABOVE: Louise Shimmel and volunteer Jocelyn Mullins work on a hawk.
LEFT: Shimmel pets Chenoa, a spotted owl.
Photos by Andrew Brackensick



is so important, she said.

Shimmel and the other volunteers at the center sit at booths, speak to classes and tout their case at every opportunity.

Although it may seem odd that Shimmel, a vegetarian for 25 years, became an expert on birds that "eat other things," she said the center evolved out of a concern for all wildlife and a particular fascination with raptors.

"Not everyone wants to take care of birds that eat other things," Shimmel said. In order to feed young raptors, volunteers sometimes have to skin the food or put it through a food processor (certainly something not everyone would want to do).

"But I just felt drawn to these animals," she said.

Apparently, the draw Shimmel felt was pretty strong because she, as the only staff member, lives on-site at the center and is on call 24 hours a day.

When the center began, most of the work was done out of Shimmel's house.

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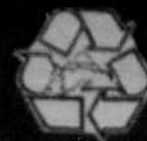
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