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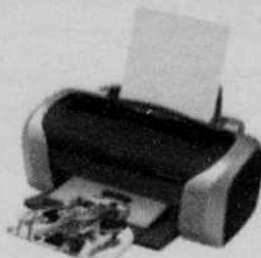
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Cascades Raptor Center volunteer and University graduate Erica Broderick holds Usiku, a southwestern barred owl. Usiku was discovered with a fractured wing by a creek in the Houston, Texas, area and was transferred to CRC in October 2003. CRC is home to 55 permanent residents.

Local center cares for birds affected by human contact

Cascades Raptor Center is a nonprofit hospital that has been caring for handicapped birds since 1987

BY KYLE DICKMAN
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

The smell of 65 dead quails would offend almost anyone, but for Laurin Coggins of the Cascades Raptor Center, a nonprofit nature center and wildlife hospital, it is hardly an inconvenience: It's just the next meal on the menu. She nonchalantly slits the bellies of the female quails, reaches in with bare hands, and removes their eggs.

"The eggs are too high in cholesterol, plus some of the birds flat out refuse to eat them," she said.

She then lays the limp birds into trays and delicately garnishes them with an algae-based vitamin mixture for the afternoon volunteers to deliver to the raptors. It is done with the care and efficiency of a five-star restaurant, but Coggins admits she would rather prepare rat.

Coggins studied art at Savannah College of Art and Design, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Oregon College of Arts and Crafts in Portland. Before she earned one of two full-time positions at the raptor center, she supported herself through her textile art. When she started feeling too self-involved, she volunteered.

"I just needed to do something for somebody else," she said.

Or something else, as it turned out. "I fell madly in love with him," she said. Coggins is referring to Leathe, a male turkey vulture. These birds choose their mates and usually stay together for life.

Leathe is one of 55 permanent bird residents adopted by the center. Most of the birds are handicapped, both physically and mentally, by

interactions with humans and will never be able to return to the wild. Leathe is an imprinted bird, or a bird that prefers the company of humans to his own species.

Coggins comments on individual birds' preferences: Edgar the crow likes grapes, particularly organic red seedless ones; Aeolus, a bald eagle, would never be found indulging himself in such extravagances, despite his apparent Greek affiliation. As Coggins approaches Zachariah-the-Raven's cage with an egg, he rolls his eyes and cackles, uninterested in Coggins but intrigued by the egg.

The bird's unique personalities attract volunteers and funding. Visitors often financially "adopt" birds. Due to regulations, adopters lacking proper certification cannot handle the raptors. Coggins' mother, who recently adopted Leathe, still loves to watch the bird interact with her daughter.

On Tuesday, Leathe moved in with Kali, the center's larger, more aggressive female turkey vulture. Coggins hopes separating the birds with mesh wire will allow the birds to grow accustomed to each other.

"We really need them to learn to deal with each other," she said.

It is an issue of space. The center cannot afford to have two birds of the same species living in separate cages.

"We always have new birds coming in," she said.

The center has grown steadily since its establishment in 1987. Initially, the organization was housed in a two-bedroom duplex with a small back yard filled with cages. It moved

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