

RAPTOR CENTER LIFTED UP BY COMMUNITY AFTER STORM

Eight days without power, seven broken aviaries, two weeks closed to visitors and dozens of damaged trees: It sounds like a bad take on the 12 days of Christmas.

Facing extensive damages after the Dec. 14 ice storm, the Cascades Raptor Center sent out a plea to its many donors: "We've been through the ringer. We need your help."

A caring community added a much brighter addition to that dire list: \$20,000 in donations to help with the storm damage.

Louise Shimmel, founder and executive director of the center says of the Dec. 29 plea for help, "We've never reached out to the community like that before and that's why it feels really amazing to have that level of support out there."

Shimmel praises her dedicated staff and volunteers, who have been "risking a lot on these roads to come in and take care of the birds." With impassible roads around the center on the side of Spencer Butte and a steep and icy driveway, Shimmel says volunteers have been "bush-whacking" through the underbrush to make it to the center, some carrying 5-gallon cans of fuel for the generator.

There's a lot more work to be done to get the center running like clockwork again. For starters, Shimmel says that after the most recent snowfall, "I'm trying to find someone with a plow to help us clear the road."

The fallen branches and trees littering the property are also a fire hazard come summer, Shimmel adds, and she expects to see a volunteer work party fixing up the areas around the aviaries in spring.



Now is an important time to support birds in the region. According to Shimmel, the snow and ice storms have made finding food very difficult for many birds of prey. The younger, newly independent birds are particularly vulnerable, Shimmel says. "The ones that are coming in essentially are starving."

One hawk that came in "should have weighed 800 grams but he weighed just 500," Shimmel says.

The center is also struggling to free space for new birds because of the weather. One eagle that's been in the center's care since 2015 is "ready to go," Shimmel says, but they have to wait for clear roads to take her up to an eagle refuge near Astoria to set her free.

"We have other birds that are waiting for that space" that can't get the extra room till the eagle moves out, she says.

The center is closed to the public again this week, due to the weather, but Shimmel says she wants to thank the community for its support.

"It's particularly humbling and rewarding because everyone was having trouble," she says. "But the fact that there was such a strong level of support and concern for the birds is just awesome."

For more info on the Cascade Raptor Center go to cascadesraptorcenter.org or call 541-485-1320.

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