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# The Raptor Trust

BY VERA LAWLOR

THE PARENT PAPER

Georgette was hatched high above the George Washington Bridge and monitored carefully by conservationists and bird enthusiasts. However, nobody was watching the day that the paragon falcon baby and her sibling prematurely plunged from their nest. Georgette was found injured on the bridge walkway and sent for rehabilitation to The Raptor Trust in Millington. Her sibling landed on the roadway and was killed by passing cars.

"Georgette had fractures in several areas including her shoulder joint," says Lauren Butcher, educational director at The Raptor Trust. "We were not able to fix her wing to the extent that she would need to survive in the wild."

So, like the other injured raptors who are unable to make it alone in nature, Georgette is now a permanent resident at the sanctuary. The rehabilitation facility is open to the public every day of the year including holidays. Visitors can get a close-up view of about 50 birds of prey representing almost 20 species – most native to our area.

"These are our permanent residents and our visitors see them on closer terms than they will probably ever see these species in the wild," Butcher says. "Many more birds are recuperating behind the scenes in our rehabilitation space. They are off limits to the public because we want to reduce their stress levels and their exposure to humans as we try to help them get better faster, and then return them to the wild."

The Raptor Trust includes a hospital with medical facilities, exterior housing for several hundred birds and an education building. It is recognized nationwide as a leader in the fields of raptor conservation and rehabilitation. The vast majority of the birds brought to the sanctuary were injured due to some type of human activity – most not intentional. Among the most common reasons for injuries: being hit by cars, attacked by dogs or cats, flying into plate glass windows, getting tangled in fishing lines or being accidentally displaced from nests during backyard clean-ups.

"One of our barred owls is here because she was hit by a car and her wing couldn't be repaired. Another screech owl was hit by car and has permanent eye damage," says Butcher. "One of our golden eagles was electrocuted on power lines and has permanent wing damage. If they perch on a line, that's OK. However, if for any reason they make the circuit complete – their feathers touch from one line to another – that can cause electrocution."

A mature female bald eagle has lived at the sanctuary for more than 20 years. This species can live for as long as 50 years in captivity. She was transferred to the facility from a sanctuary in Alaska that had to re-home many of its residents following an oil spill.

"One of her eyes is completely atrophied, so she only has use of one eye. For bald eagles, that is something that would compromise them so much that they couldn't survive in the wild," says Butcher.

Not all of the sanctuary residents suffered injuries that were unintentional on the part of humans.

"Our young bald eagle was found at a bear-baiting station in Maine where he was shot intentionally because he was being a nuisance from the perspective of the hunter," says Butcher.

The youngster's injuries are permanent and now he will live out his life in the company of the mature bald eagle.

"We feel that our resident birds – even if they can't go back and contribute to the success of their species in the wild – are contributing by educating people," says Butcher. "Visitors to the sanctuary, and people who attend the educational programs, go away with a better understanding about raptors and a greater sense of the importance of protecting them in the wild."

About 10 of the permanent residents are used in the educational programs, including Georgette. When she is used in the programs, those attending learn about how her species was almost completely wiped out of the Eastern United States and about how they made a comeback after the ban on the pesticide DDT. Their numbers are also growing thanks to aggressive management activities to reintroduce the birds to this part of the country. The educational program also teaches visitors about the awesome abilities of raptors.

"I am especially impressed with the paragon falcons. The fact that they can dive at over 200 miles an hour or that they can migrate for over 9,000 miles in the fall is just amazing to me," says Butcher. "We feel so fortunate to work with a bird like Georgette and we have tremendous respect for her."

IF YOU GO:

The Raptor Trust is located at 1390 White Bridge Road in Millington. The facility is open daily (including holidays) during daylight hours. Visitors can view at close range the many hawks, eagles, falcons and owls that are permanent residents of the facility. Suggested donation of \$2 per person. For more information, call 908-647-2353; or visit [www.theraptortrust.org](http://www.theraptortrust.org).

Vera Lawlor writes about a nearby destination each month in The Parent Paper.

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