



NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2026

RARE SEEKS TO ENRICH LIVES BY ENGAGING IN AND PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP OF THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND PRO-ACTIVE EFFORTS TO PRESERVE WILDLIFE

Hello Friends of **RARE**

Welcome to the latest edition of the RARE newsletter. As raptors across Iowa begin nesting and raising their young, our team is hard at work caring for injured birds, supporting fledglings learning to fly, and helping them prepare for a successful return to the wild. Inside, you'll find stories from the rehabilitation center highlighting birds we've helped this past quarter, updates on new programs like our Sponsor an Education Bird initiative, and a closer look at the people and volunteers who make this important work possible. We hope these stories inspire you and deepen your connection to the incredible raptors that share our skies.

-The RARE Team



**RAPTOR
ADVOCACY
REHABILITATION
EDUCATION**



RAPTOR BABY SEASON:

THE STORY OF YOUNG RAPTOR

Spring is one of the busiest and most exciting times of year for raptor rehabilitators. Across Iowa, hawks, owls, falcons, and eagles are beginning a new generation. From tiny hatchlings in early spring to confident young hunters by late summer, this season offers a fascinating look at how raptors grow up in the wild.

FROM NESTING TO HUNTER: A RAPTOR'S FIRST MONTHS

Nesting is the period when birds prepare for and raise their young. For raptors, this begins when a pair selects a nesting site and builds or repairs their nest. Many raptors return to the same nest year after year, adding sticks and lining materials each spring. You can usually find nests high in trees, on cliff ledges, or occasionally on human-made structures where the birds can safely raise their young.

In Iowa, some species begin nesting surprisingly early. The Great Horned Owl often starts incubating eggs as early as February, sometimes while snow is still on the ground. Many hawks, including the Red-tailed Hawk and Cooper's Hawk, typically lay eggs in early spring, with chicks hatching between April and May.

When raptor chicks hatch, they are covered in adorable, soft white downy feathers and rely entirely on their parents. Adults hunt frequently and bring food back to the nest while protecting the chicks from predators and harsh weather.

Within a few weeks, the chicks grow rapidly and begin developing their juvenile feathers. They strengthen their wings by flapping and hopping around the nest. By early summer, many young raptors reach an important stage called fledging.

Fledging is when young birds leave the nest for the first time. They are not fully independent yet and often spend several weeks on the ground or perched low in trees while they continue building strength. Their parents usually remain nearby, bringing food and keeping watch until the young birds are ready to begin hunting on their own.



FOUND A BABY BIRD ON THE GROUND?

Each spring, wildlife rehabilitators receive many calls about baby birds that appear to have fallen from nests. In many cases, these birds are actually healthy fledglings going through a normal stage of development.

IF YOU FIND A BABY BIRD:

1. Observe first.

If the bird is feathered and hopping or fluttering, it is likely a fledgling. Its parents are probably nearby and still caring for it.

2. Give it space.

Keep pets and people away so the parents can safely return and take care of the fledgling.

2. Help only if necessary.

If the bird is clearly injured, very young with little or no feathers, or in immediate danger, call a wildlife rehabber. They have the training and facilities to properly care for an injured or orphaned bird of prey.

HOW YOU CAN HELP RAPTORS THRIVE

Spring is a critical time for young wildlife, and a little awareness goes a long way. Watching from a distance, keeping pets supervised outdoors, being cautious of what trees you cut down, and contacting professionals when a bird truly needs help can make a big difference for Iowa's raptors. At The RARE Group, spring and summer bring many young patients. With proper care and patience, many of these birds will one day soar across Iowa's skies as the next generation of hunters.





EDUCATION

In the first quarter of the year, our educators (both bird and human) have gone to five different locations. In January, we attended the Muscatine Eagle Watch and the LeClaire Eagle Festival. February found us at FeatherStone and Walden Place Senior Living in Iowa City. And on the Spring Equinox we're presenting at The Gathering of the Green event in Davenport.

Are you looking for a fun and educational event this year? Contact RARE to give a raptor presentation at your organization! At our programs, we discuss nocturnal and diurnal raptors, how these raptors have evolved to survive in the wild, and things you can do to help them thrive.

Our programming is for all ages - from preschools to retirement homes, from summer camps to college classes. We'll even do birthday and graduation parties! For pricing information, send an email to help@theraregroup.org. Our calendar fills up fast, especially in the summer, so don't walk - fly on over to our inbox!

And don't forget to check us out at Ecofest in Cedar Rapids on April 25th! We'll be giving two programs.



New Sponsorship Programs!

Check out our new Sponsor an Avian Ambassador program! Support one of our resident avian ambassadors and help provide the care they need while they inspire the public to learn more about birds of prey and conservation. 🦅

Learn more about sponsoring a raptor here





RELEASES

One of our ultimate goals is to strengthen conservation by giving these beautiful birds a second chance at life. This last quarter, we are thrilled to have multiple releases. Below are a few of their stories.



BALD EAGLE - LEAD POISONING

After being spotted grounded for more than a day near Gladwin, a Bald Eagle that could not fly was safely captured and brought to The RARE Group for care. Tests revealed a broken foot and lead poisoning, but with weeks of treatment, the feisty eagle regained her strength and even gained several pounds during recovery. On Jan 14, we were thrilled to have this eagle return home to Gladwin.


AMERICAN KESTREL - EXHAUSTION

This small but mighty raptor was our very first patient of the year. Coming to us all the way from Ottumwa, he was found unable to fly. After an initial exam, we found nothing out of the ordinary and decided to give him a safe place to rest. By the next day, he was exhibiting behavior on par with his feisty species, and a few days after that was ready to be released back home.



BARRED OWL - HEAD TRAUMA

This barred owl was our 5th admit of 2026 - brought in for head trauma from a suspected car collision. After a few weeks of rest and recovery, it is flying free once again.



RESCUE STORY

ABOUT LEAD POISONING IN EAGLES

In November, The RARE Group received a call about a grounded Bald Eagle near Gladwin in Louisa County. The bird had been on the ground for more than a day. When rescuers arrived, she could not fly but managed to run through tall grass before being safely captured and brought to RARE.



After the initial assessment and examination, we learned that she had a broken foot but was otherwise in good body condition with plenty of fat reserves. Blood tests revealed the real concern. Her lead level measured 24.6, considered mid-high lead poisoning. Readings around 65 are considered extremely dangerous.

Lead poisoning is one of the most common threats facing Bald Eagles in the Midwest. Eagles often scavenge on deer carcasses or gut piles left in the field during hunting season or eat lead fishing tackle stuck in the fish they hunt. When ammunition fragments remain in the meat, even a tiny piece of lead can be toxic. Once ingested, lead attacks the nervous system and muscles, causing weakness, paralysis, and an inability to hunt or fly. According to [SOAR's](#) reporting, out of 942 eagles admitted for rehabilitation between 2004 and 2025, 34% suffered from life-threatening levels of lead poisoning in Iowa alone. The real number is likely higher since many birds are never found.

RARE volunteers treated the eagle for lead poisoning and set her broken foot. She proved to be feisty, ate well, and gained nearly four pounds during her recovery.

This story has a happy ending. On January 14, she was released exactly where she was found. The moment the transport box was opened, she soared into the air and settled into a nearby tree. Her recovery reminds us that while rescues are inspiring, lead poisoning in wildlife is entirely preventable. Using non-lead ammunition or tackle and properly disposing of remains helps keep toxic metals out of the food chain and ensures Bald Eagles continue to soar over Iowa's rivers and fields.

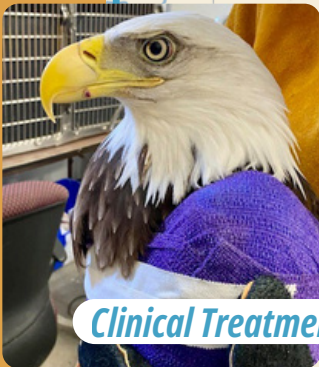




Rescue



Clinical Exam



Clinical Treatment



Flight Rehabilitation



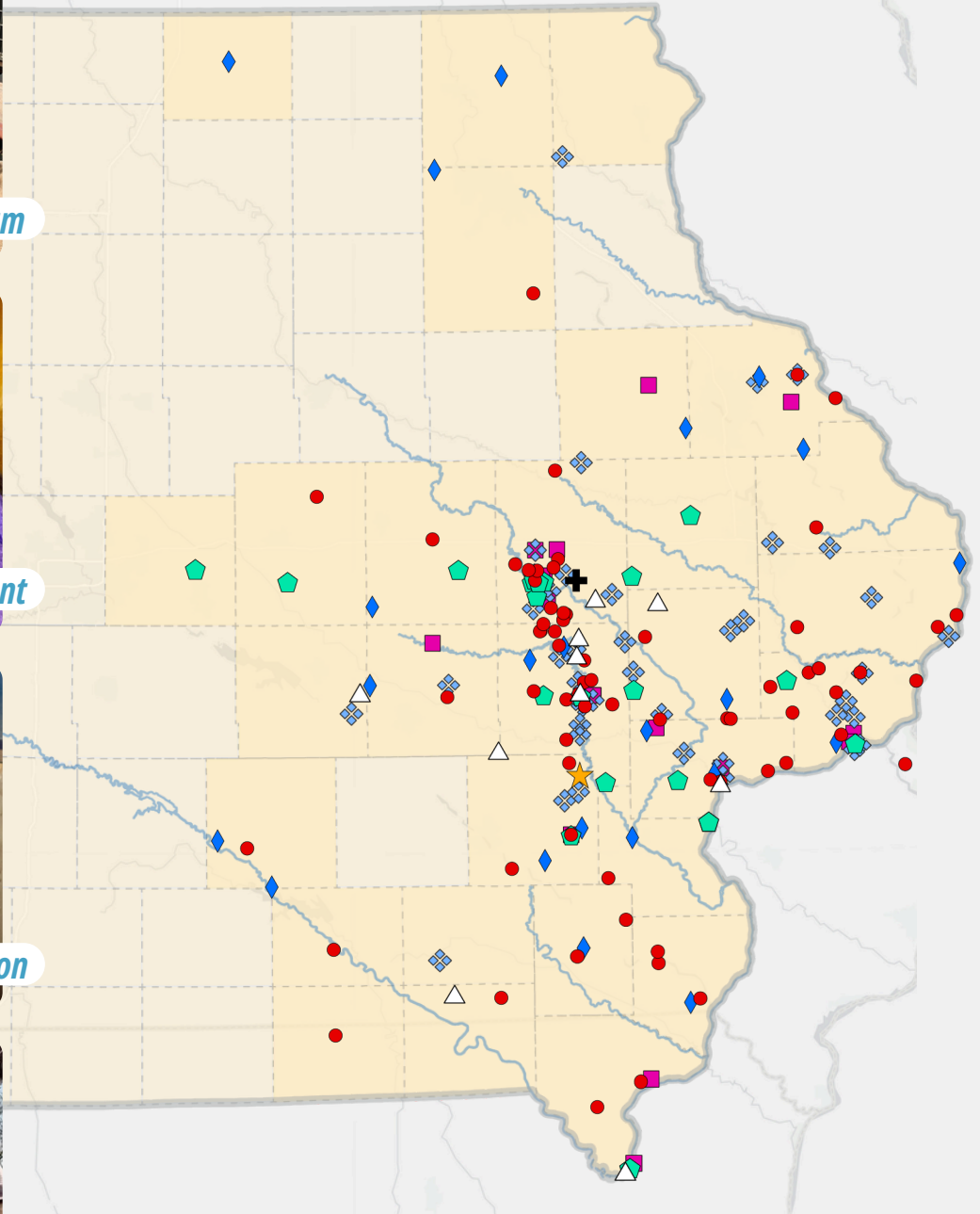
Release

RARE Cares for Iowa's Raptors



theraregroup.org

In 2025, the RARE Group cared for 183 raptors, rescued from the locations shown on the map.



2025 Raptors Cared for by RARE, by Group:

- Accipiter (17)
- ◆ Eagle (22)
- ★ Harrier (1)
- Owl (68)
- ◆ Buteo (42)
- ◆ Falcon (22)
- + Osprey (1)
- △ Vulture (10)



MEET THE REHABBER: ELANA

While Elana joined RARE in 2019, she began her journey in raptor rehabilitation years earlier. In 2013, after moving from Illinois to attend the University of Iowa, Elana discovered the MacBride Nature Center in Solon. There, she began volunteering and later became an intern, assisting with feeding, cleaning enclosures, and leading educational tours.

Her passion for wildlife rehabilitation deepened through an opportunity to do rehab with raptors at Kirkwood Community College. On the very first day, Elana helped administer fluids to a Bald Eagle under the supervision of a licensed rehabber that was a life changing experience that she will forever be grateful for. That moment sparked a continued commitment to raptor rehabilitation.

After being with RARE for 5 years, In 2024, Elana began her apprenticeship and went on to become a general class licensed wildlife rehabber at the beginning of this year.

Elana's favorite part of volunteering with RARE is witnessing raptor releases. Seeing a fully rehabilitated bird return to the wild is incredibly rewarding, especially knowing the level of care and teamwork that contributed to its recovery.

For anyone interested in pursuing wildlife rehabilitation, their advice is simple: **DO IT.**

Outside of RARE, you can find Elana watching movies, reading, spending time with family and friends, and staying active through boxing and dance.



2026 DONORS

THANK YOU FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN RAPTORS LIVES

DONATIONS MADE FROM 1/1/26 - 3/17/26

Don & Diana Morgan
Deborah Conklin
Julie Englander
Rebecca Schmuecker
Vicki Pawlowski
Elizabeth Haas

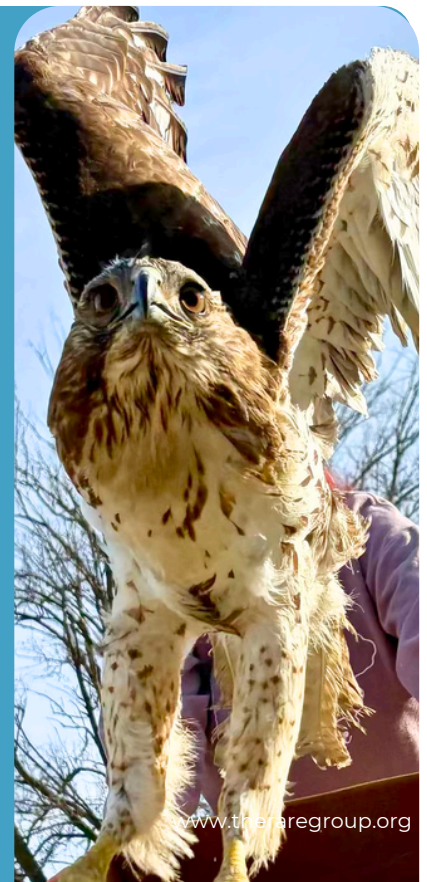
Maria Chambers
Jennifer Duling
Kathy Janz
Stephanie Linnell
Crystal Shepherd

Elana Becker
Tallie Foster
Keegan Engling
Debra Benner
Ryan & Kylie Morency

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SCAN ME TO DONATE





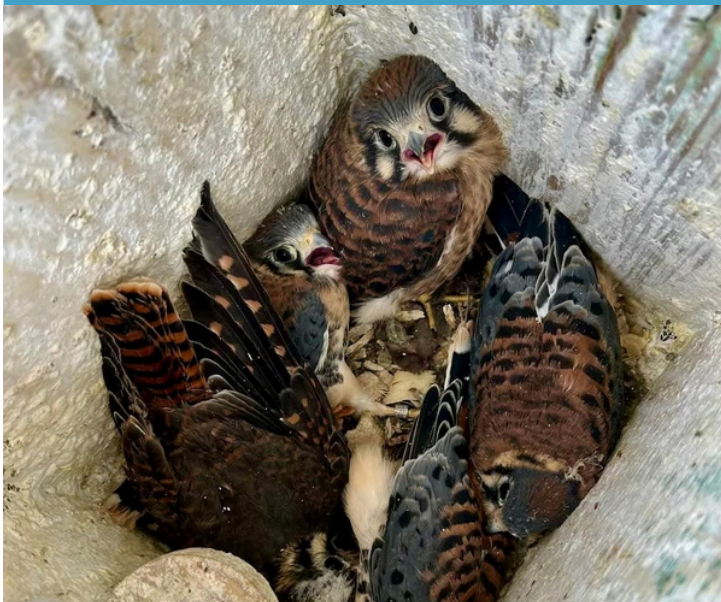
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Mon - Sun 8:00 am - 5:00 pm



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