

WINGBEATS

Issue 2026 #2



RAPTOR Inc. makes a measurable impact on local wildlife every year. The first bird rescued in 2026, on New Year's day, was a bald eagle from deep inside East Fork State Park.

SOARING HIGHER, STILL

As the United States approaches its 250th birthday, the bald eagle remains our most recognizable symbol of strength, independence, and national pride. But behind that fierce stare and iconic white head lies a trait that feels, at first glance at least, a little un-American.

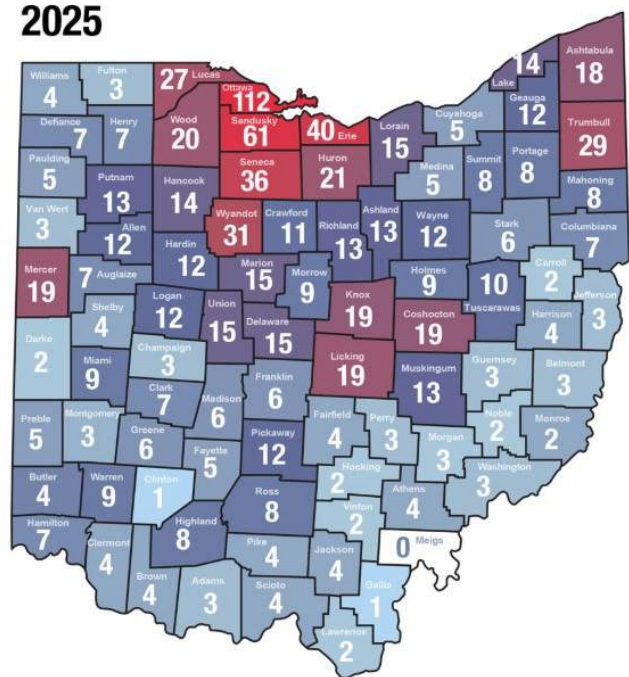
Bald eagles are unapologetic freeloaders. Sure, they're formidable hunters in their own right, but why work harder than necessary? A surprising share of their meals comes not from the thrill of the chase, but from outright theft. When eagles and ospreys share habitat, the sky turns into a high-stakes shakedown. Eagles will harass ospreys mid-flight, causing those smaller raptors to drop their freshly caught fish. With that, the eagle swoops in to claim the spoils. The academic term for this aerial mugging is "*kleptoparasitism*," where "klepto" hints at stealing (think "kleptomaniac") and "parasitism" has the root "parasite." Bald eagles also scavenge carrion, and they can be a common sight near fish processing plants in Alaska and elsewhere, where discarded fish remnants offer them a buffet-style feast.

But hold on just a minute, Ben Franklin. You may recall that Ben famously lobbied for wild turkeys as the national bird. This eagle behavior is not laziness; it's efficiency. *(Continued on page 9.)*

The eagle's remarkable comeback over the last few decades, both in Ohio and nationwide, proves how much we can accomplish when we conserve and protect habitat.

Mary Merz, ODNR Director

2025



GIFTS

Thanks to the stakeholders listed on this page who supported us in the first calendar quarter of 2026.



Photo credit: Hunter Mitchell

Bald Eagle - \$10,000 or more

Herschend Enterprise Fund

Osprey - \$1,000-\$9,999

Cindy & Marc Alverson
 Gay & Jeff Bullock
 Cincinnati Zoo &
 Botanical Gardens
 Alan Gast
 Margaret Hayden
 Tracy & Martin Hayden
 Lisa & Jeff Hays
 Joseph Lucas
 Jo & John Miller
 Julie & Mark Moore
 Nestle Purina
 Michelle & Jim Rahtz
 Spring Grove Cemetery
 & Arboretum
 Rosemary & Frank Varga
 Cynthia & Steve Wesselkamper
 Wild Birds Unlimited Cincinnati



Photo credit: Elisabeth Dirjans

Peregrine Falcon - \$500-\$999

Kroger
 Bruce Lippard
 Gary & Marianne Lord
 Donna Parry
 Jeff Ares & Catherine Snider

Sustaining Gifts, to \$499

Teresa Ahrenholz
 Susan Anderson
 Eddie Annal
 Anonymous
 Sandra Barkey
 Heather Barrett
 Kathryn & Frederick Bingham
 Richard Binstadt
 Kearston Boggs
 Bruce Breitholle
 Linda Chastang
 Avonelle Combs
 Joanne Conradi
 Beverly Dorenbusch
 Merilee Duncan
 Lisa Ehrichs
 Jim Farfsing
 Mona Faske
 Joan Gilmore
 Jason Griffis

Sustaining Gifts, to \$499

Buck Hausman
 Michelle Hensley
 Kristin Holland
 Charlene Howell
 Sarah Judd
 Dr. Gary Kelm
 Patricia Lawrence
 Sarah Lestrud
 Linda Martin
 Georgette McClain
 David Meiners
 Brenda Paulson
 PayPal Giving Fund
 Gayle Pille
 Amy & Scott Ready
 Barbara Rininger
 Kathy Roos
 Karen Rost
 Michael Sand
 Kimberly Springmier
 Ray Strecker
 Mary Suhre
 Total Quality Logistics
 Jennifer Welling
 Jason Wells
 Sandra Wetzel
 Stacy Woolery
 Bonnie Zellen

Gifts in Kind

Wolfgang Fenig
 Jen Gillen
 Tracy & Martin Hayden
 Suzanne Jackson
 Shelley Lamb
 Wendy & Robert Leach
 Spring Grove Cemetery
 & Arboretum
 Estate of Gwendolyn Steffen

SOARING CURIOSITY



All photos credit: RAPTOR Inc.

SOAR (Science, Observation, and Raptors) is our new hands-on wildlife science program for underserved first graders. The idea is simple: bring wildlife science into the classroom.

During the 2025–2026 school year, limited grant funding allowed us to reach eight first-grade classrooms, with 168 students, across two rural districts, Western Brown Local and Williamsburg Local. Each first-grade class received five days of standards-aligned, educator-led lessons, brought to life with our live Avian Ambassador raptors, feathers, and other biofacts, anchored to the kid-friendly anchor text *The Ghost of Donley Farm*.

In total, SOAR educators delivered 40 hours of programming, more than double the 2023-2024 pilot effort.

Still, we reached only a fraction of the classrooms we hoped to serve. Not because demand isn't there, it is, and our search for additional grant funding is ongoing.

We aimed SOAR at students who miss out on field trips due to finances, or logistics, or special needs. SOAR brings field trip experiences to students in their schools, where they learn.



SOAR is accessible, engaging, and designed for learners who are often left out.

We've even seen interest in SOAR from schools that don't qualify for free or discounted programming but recognize the value of the program's hands-on science approach.

The impact is clear. Pre-tests and post-SOAR assessments, teacher feedback, and student work show gains in knowledge, curiosity, confidence, and compassion for wildlife.

Saving the wild. Saving us. At a time when field trips are increasingly out of reach for many, SOAR ensures that hands-on science still lands in classrooms. With that, imaginations soar.



CARDINAL EAGLE CAM



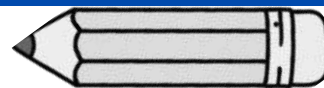
You can watch the live stream of the Cardinal Land Conservancy eagle cam by scanning the QR Code or clicking the link.
<https://bit.ly/cardinal-eagle-cam>

The photos on this page are from the Cardinal Cam live stream, and appear among its 500+ comments.



A Naturalist's Notes

By Jordan West



- ① bare tree holds the nest
white head lifts above the rim
silent watch below
- ② air river unseen
wide wings balance on the wind
branch in sharp talons
- ③ autumn frames the scene
still eyes search the forest edge
motion gives it life
- ④ high on pine it waits
white and dark against clear sky
kingdom spread below

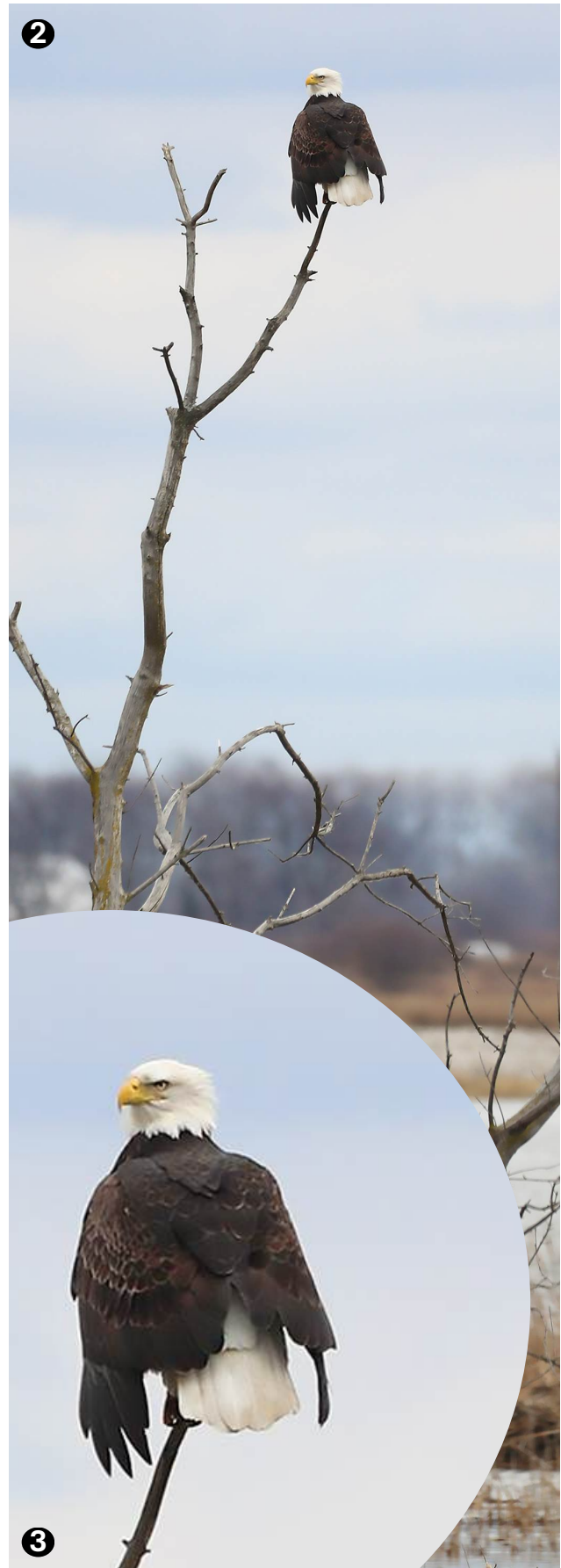


1 wings rise in a V
over fields of green and gold
purpose without words

2 bare trunk meets the sky
keen eyes sharpen distant air
near, the wild takes form

3 bare tree watchtower
eagle's gaze within the frame
drawn into its world

4 barren branch swaying
eagle lands with wings outstretched
mystery on high



HISTORY CORNER

Charley Harper's 1978 image "Hare's Breadth," (on the right) captures a moment of escape: a rabbit in mid-leap, rendered in the artist's signature minimalist realism style. That same year, the renowned Harper designed another image of flight that we think is equally iconic, though far less known: the RAPTOR Inc. logo.

The connection between these two works is no coincidence. Longtime RAPTOR volunteers recall a 1978 gathering when Harper joined with RAPTOR founder, Jim Williams, a Hamilton County Park District naturalist, and a few other committed conservationists in Williams's living room. In that informal setting, an early vision for RAPTOR Inc. and its conservation messaging was laid out. Harper agreed to design the RAPTOR Inc. logo, which remains in use today (see below), serving as a lasting imprint of that moment and carrying forward both the group's spirit and Harper's distinctive artistic vision.

When asked about the similarity in December 2025, Brett Harper, Charley's son who now manages the Charley Harper Art Studio, wryly observed that his father could bring new life to certain images through thoughtful reuse. It's a testament to the elder Harper's creative efficiency - the same visual language that worked for a hare's desperate dash also perfectly conveyed a raptor's focused dive.



"The cottontail has just had a close encounter - of the bird kind - with an Unfriendly Flying Object. He had just eluded a fox that had trailed him through a meadow when he spotted it, hovering over the old maple at the edge of the clearing. It was roundish and squarish and oblongish and reddish and grayish and, WOW, it moved with incredible speed as he raced the shadow of the red-tailed hawk to the nearest groundhog hole, winning by a hair."

– Charley Harper

Source: <https://www.charleyharperartstudio.com/hares-breadth-serigraph.html>

MEMBER EVENTS



Photo credit: Kylie Lipa

Members can attend regularly scheduled Members-Only Speaker Events. This member perk premiered in February with Jeff Hays delivering his *My Story: 35 Years of Raptors*. Jeff's presentation was followed last month by Cindy Alverson's *Bird's-Eye View of RAPTOR Inc.* Mark your calendar for these upcoming Member-Only Speaker Series Events.

August 6, 2026

Cheryl R. Dykstra, PhD, is a wildlife ecologist and independent raptor researcher based in Cincinnati, known for her long-term work on red-shouldered hawks and other raptors and for serving as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Raptor Research*.

November 19, 2026

As a park ranger in the Hamilton County Park District, Jim Williams was instrumental in founding the predecessor of RAPTOR Inc. and operating it from his home at the Farbach-Werner Nature Preserve in the 1970s. Joining Jim on a panel recalling those early days will be a few of the earliest stakeholders.

Soaring Eagles, continued from page 2.

In the wild, survival favors the strategic, not just the strong. By conserving energy and capitalizing on opportunity, bald eagles maximize their chances of thriving, especially in harsh winter conditions or when raising young.

Ohio logged a statewide low of four nesting pairs in 1979, compared to the 2025 statewide ODNR nest census that documented 964 active bald eagle nests in Ohio, with nests in 87 of Ohio's 88 counties. Arguably, eagles' flexible feeding strategy is part of what helped the species rebound so successfully after near-extinction in the 20th century.

There's a subtle lesson here for our nation at 250: resilience isn't just about grit. It's about adaptability. The bald eagle endures not because it plays by a single rulebook, but because it knows when to hunt, when to wait, and when to take advantage of the moment.

Maybe that's a patriotism that's rooted not just in strength, but in survival.



Photo credit: Dee Carpenter Photography

ACCESSIBILITY HOUR

After our March open house, a mom shared that her son, who loves owls, struggles with mobility and that the open house was a challenge for him. She was right. Our open house wasn't accessible to her son, and maybe to other guests who are troubled by crowds or loud noises. You'll soon see us striving to do better.

Our Accessibility Hour debuts June 28 and will make repeat appearances at the August 30 and October 25 open houses.

To attend, reserve your spot in advance. Free pre-registration is required and closes 24 hours before each event. Call (513) 825-3325 or email director@raptorinc.org with the subject line "Accessibility Hour" to sign up or ask questions.

During Accessibility Hour, we'll work to ensure that guests with special needs can more fully enjoy our birds, activities, and space. We're partnering with Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, and that same mom – now our "accessibility consultant" – to help us learn as we go. When we know better, we can do better.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

RAPTOR Inc. is looking for a few more flockmates to keep our mission soaring: Saturday Crew heroes who do the unglamorous but essential work of cleaning up after our Ambassador and rehab birds, horticulture helpers who keep our gardens and grounds looking as lovely as a spring migration morning, and behind-the-scenes administrative allies who help keep the lights on and the doors open.

If scrubbing mews, pulling weeds, or wrangling spreadsheets sounds like your kind of conservation, visit raptorinc.org and click "Volunteer" under the "Support Us" tab to learn more and apply.

Which of those areas would fit you best right now: Saturday Crew, horticulture, or admin? Let us know because nothing can stop what we can do together.

RAPTOR Inc. Board

Robert Smith, President
Jim Rahtz, Vice President
Brooke Fox, Secretary
Mark Moore, Treasurer
Marc Alverson
Dan Begin
Gay Bullock
Bob Dahlhausen, DVM
Jeff Hays
Jonas Locke
Joe Lucas

Our Veterinarians

Bob Dahlhausen, DVM
D.J. Haeussler, DVM
J. Peter Hill, DVM
Vanessa Kuonen Cavens, DVM
Paul Levitas, DVM
Ann Manharth, DVM

Our Staff

Shannon Frantz
Alice McCaleb
Will Schaust
Steve Wesselkamper

PUBLIC APPEARANCES

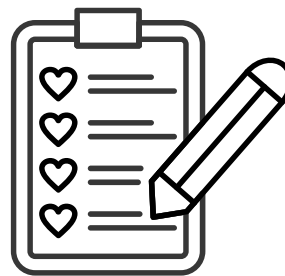
Scan the QR code for a current list of public RAPTOR Inc. conservation education events.



Photo credits: Hunter Mitchell, Kenton County, KY

DID YOU CHECK OUR AMAZON WISH LIST?

You can scan the QR code to order from our Amazon Wish List and everything you order is delivered directly to RAPTOR Inc. We will let you know that your gift arrived.



If you're headed to the store, you can be sure we always need -

- small plastic totes
- nitrile gloves (m)
- old newspapers
- paper towels

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Sponsor a Banded Raptor

Since the fall of 1994, RAPTOR Inc. has been banding birds released back into the wild. Each tiny band is a symbol of recovery and a new beginning, and every return offers clues to the our rehabilitation work and the resilience of the birds we return to nature. Through our **Sponsor a Banded Raptor** program, you can join that story. Sponsors receive a personalized certificate with the bird's unique band details (sent to the US Geological Survey's Bird Banding Lab) and a Fact Sheet that reveals what makes the species remarkable.

☐ Yes, I would like to sponsor the banded raptor species indicated below, and you will contact me to arrange an alternative if the selection(s) is (are) not available. **My \$250 payment (check or card information) is enclosed.**

☐ American kestrel ☐ Barred owl ☐ Cooper's hawk ☐ Eastern screech owl
☐ Great horned owl ☐ Red-shouldered hawk ☐ Red-tailed hawk

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

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Card # Exp CVV