

Fall 2025



BRANCHING OUT



Ford the aplomado falcon flying to a glove.

Falconry Experiences at ARC

Falcons and humans have shared a relationship for thousands of years. Falconry is thought to have originated in central Asia as a means of sustenance and sport. Over time, falconry spread across the globe and across cultures, with each culture having slightly different practices and birds depending on the region. While falcons were most commonly used, hawks, eagles, and even owls were also used in the hunt.

Even in modern times, falconry still has an important role in human societies. While many people practice falconry for sport, a few societies still rely on the partnership with their birds to provide food.

At the Avian Reconditioning Center, we offer private Falconry Experiences where you can learn about the fascinating art and history of falconry. There are two options available: Owl Experiences and Falcon Experiences. Both experiences are guided by an experienced falconer who will teach you about the sport as well as proper handling and safety techniques. Each experience, designed for up to four guests, allows for plenty of photo opportunities.

Our Owl Experience is a 45-minute private encounter with our amazing barn owls, Ella and Henry. Ella is a 2-year-old American barn owl, and Henry is an 18-year-old Western (European) barn owl. Both Ella and Henry are captive-bred barn owls, raised to be education and falconry birds. They both have extensive training to interact with guests and perch on their gloves. You do not have to choose between them; our Owl Experiences allow you to spend time with both Ella and Henry!

In our 45-minute private Falcon Experience, you'll have the unique opportunity to have Ford, our 2-year-old aplomado falcon, fly directly to your glove. You'll also learn about important falcon training techniques such as lure training.

Owl and Falcon Experiences are offered on-site every Saturday, September through July. Tickets are available for purchase on our website, www.arc4raptors.org, or by scanning the QR code at the bottom of this page.



Barn owls Henry (left) and Ella (right).

A Record Breaking Baby Season

In Florida, January is typically the start of baby season for great-horned owls, with courtship and breeding happening in November and December. Owlets usually hatch in January and February. To prepare, we provide nesting supplies like pine needles and sticks for our great-horned owl mom, Nonamé. Nonamé doesn't build much of a nest, which is typical for her species, and since she cannot fly due to an old fracture, we build her a nest on the ground. Although this year started slowly with no owlets admitted in January, it quickly became our busiest baby season yet.

Our first great-horned owlet of the year arrived on February 4th. This tiny owlet, covered in a layer of soft natal down, was found abandoned with no nest or parents around. After a brief quarantine, the owlet was placed in the care of Nonamé, a full surrogate who cares for the owlets she receives as if they were her own. She feeds them, keeps them safe and warm, and teaches them how to be great-horned owls. This owlet was the first of what would eventually be a total of 45 great-horned owlets for the year, ranging from nestlings to juveniles.

These great-horned owlets were just the beginning! As March arrived, so did the next batch of babies, barred owlets! This year marked a first for our barred owl educational ambassador, Mrs. P. After watching Mrs. P. display brooding behaviors, we decided to carefully place our barred owlets in her enclosure. Much to our delight, Mrs. P. interacted with the owlets; she even fed them!

Our busiest months were yet to come, as April and May brought numerous young birds from several different species: red-shouldered hawks, eastern screech owls, barn owls, American kestrels, and Cooper's hawks. We consider ourselves very lucky to have surrogate parents for several of these species, including Henry the barn owl, Lucy the eastern screech owl, and American kestrels Moira and Professor Slinky. You (cont. next pg)



Great-horned owlets in Nonamé's enclosure.



Surrogate father, Henry, with barn owlets



Barred owlets



Three eastern screech owl nestlings

cannot force a raptor to be a surrogate; they have to display the right behaviors and signs that they will accept the young, and even then, the pairing must be carefully monitored.

Our largest number of intakes from a single species was red-shouldered hawks. Red-shouldered hawks are a very common hawk in Florida, often nesting in and around our neighborhoods. This year, we admitted 79 red-shouldered hawks, from tiny nestlings to juveniles who just weren't quite ready to leave the nest yet.

The arrival of all of these birds means a lot of additional work for our staff and volunteers, who clean, maintain, and perform regular health and welfare checks on all of the birds. One of the biggest challenges of caring for this many young raptors is nutrition. This year, many of the young birds we received were nestlings, requiring the most care. Raptors go from hatching to full-size in around 12 weeks, requiring a large amount of food to sustain such fast growth. For our great-horned owls alone, this meant over \$18,000 in food costs over a period of four months.

Why so many young birds? There isn't one definitive answer. Everything from the weather to land development can impact nesting birds of prey. This year began with a drought, and this lack of rain could have affected the initial courtship and breeding period of many species. The drought gave way to storms with heavy rain and strong winds. These sudden, strong storms can destroy nest trees and tear apart nests, leaving the babies with nowhere to go but the ground. Parents will often still try to care for the young but may be unable to do so due to predators and human activity. Spring tree cutting and land development during nesting season also impacts the number of raptors we admit. Some of the nestlings we admitted this year came from locations where tree trimming and removal resulted in destroyed nests.

Baby Season Admits

Red-shouldered Hawks: 79
Great-horned Owls: 45
Eastern Screech Owls: 24
American Kestrels: 33
Cooper's Hawks: 16
Mississippi Kites: 14
Barred Owls: 9
Red-tailed Hawks: 7
Barn Owls: 4
Swallow-tailed Kites: 4



Nestling, prefledgling, and juvenile red-shouldered hawks

Nestling Cooper's Hawk



Great-horned owllets in a flight enclosure



Surrogate mother, Lucy, with eastern screech owllets



Important Dates and Upcoming Events



ARC September Opening
September 6

Wings, Wildflowers and Art in
the Garden
September 27

Owl at the Moon
October 25

Holiday Raptor Mingle
December 6

Roaming Raptors Education Programs

Looking for a unique education program for your school, club, or event? ARC's Roaming Raptors programs can provide a great learning opportunity for all ages. Our programs focus on raptors, their natural history, and their importance to us and our environment. Our four-bird Roaming Raptor programs are customizable to fit your audience and subject focus. School programs can be structured to fit into your current content focus and standard, including the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards for Science (NGSSS).

Our educational programs can be booked on-site at our facility or at a suitable location you choose. Visit our website for more information, including pricing and availability in your area.



Come Visit Us!



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