



Spring
2025



Number of Wildlife Patients
Treated since 2009: > 34,800

"...responsible stewardship of wildlife and habitat."

"Big Girl, the Red-Tailed Hawk Goes Home"

By Vanessa Zimmer

So, here we were, a week before Christmas, turning a Red-tailed Hawk out into the cold.

Well, not exactly. It wasn't that cold, for one thing. And we're betting that she was glad, happy, grateful—whatever it is a hawk feels when returning from a scary place to familiar territory.

No doubt, she was in better physical shape than the month before, when the Utah Division of Wildlife Services learned of an injured bird near the community of South Weber. They found her on the ground, unable to stand, her right eye so swollen she couldn't even blink.

The DWR took her to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah in Ogden, where she was examined from head to toe. The exam indicated no broken bones, but the bloodwork and swollen eye suggested some kind of trauma. Maybe a collision of some sort?

The WRCNU followed medical protocol placing her on fluids, anti-inflammatories, and provided supportive care ... and then waited hopefully.

By Day 3, she wasn't standing but was able to sit up on her hocks and her eye was clearing. Her legs began to function, but she wasn't strong enough to tear apart a mouse with her beak and talons. The staff began hand-feeding her bits of mice, not an easy task when the bird clearly did not trust the humans appearing outside her enclosure.

Imagine you're taken captive by an alien spaceship, executive director DaLyn Marthaler offers as an example. "She's totally convinced everything we give her is going to kill her."

Still, the hawk improved enough that about three weeks after entering rehab she was relocated to a bigger enclosure, called a *mew* (a large enclosure for raptors) outside the WRCNU facility. "At that point, she started eating on her own," says Marthaler.

Marthaler referred to her as *Big Girl*, because her size was well over the average 3-pound weight of the typical female Red-tailed Hawk.

By Dec. 5, Big Girl was flying inside the mew, so the WRCNU prescribed some strength training, consisting of an exercise called creance flying. Jesses, short leather straps, are placed on the bird's ankles and a line attached. One person gently tosses the bird into the air, and another individual, the brakeman, controls the resistance and the height of the flight pattern. The handlers look for details like the height the bird attains, the symmetry of the wings, the spreading of the tail. *Continued: Big Girl pg. 2*



Rhett Skinner, Rehab Apprentice
With "Big Girl" during treatment
for head trauma



"Big Girl" during treatment, Nov 2024

Right: Arthur Moss about to
release "Big Girl" in honor of his
wife Ruth Y. Moss.
Dec 17, 2024



Big Girl Continued

Within a week, she was flying so strongly “that it was time for her to go,” says Marthaler. A clear day came, Dec. 17, when Big Girl was to be released. “We took her back home,” Marthaler says; WRCNU policy is to release birds back in their home territory.

* * *

Flash back to seven years before, when another Red-tailed Hawk saga also ended happily.

On July 4, 2017, Ruth Moss was sitting on the patio of her Logan home, doing what she and her husband often did, watching deer graze next to the Logan River. This time, something moved, one deer jumped, the deer dispersed, and Art Moss went down to investigate. He found a red-tailed hawk with an injured wing. They called animal control, the bird was taken away, and that was that.

Sometime later, Buz Marthaler, chairman of the WRCNU nonprofit’s board, called the Mosses to alert them that they had been treating the bird and would like to release the recovering bird in a few weeks at the Moss property. The couple didn’t even know the WRCNU existed, but they readily complied.

So Buz drove up to Logan, opened the door of the red-tail’s cage, and the bird flew off to a tree on the Mosses’ lower bench. “We really appreciated what Buz and DaLyn did,” says Art. Thus began a long connection and friendship. The Mosses contributed regularly to the nonprofit organization.

Remembering that in December of 2024, and also knowing Ruth had recently passed away, Buz phoned Art and asked him if he would like to assist in the release of the Red-tail called Big Girl. “Of course,” Art said.

And so came the big day, a week before Christmas, in a park in South Weber. Buz opened Big Girl’s cage door, but she wouldn’t come out. Buz directed Art to hold the bird with his hands over her wings and then gently toss her into the air. Art says he’d never done anything like that before, but he wasn’t nervous: “Buz says the bird is the one that’s nervous,” Art says.

Big Girl flew close to the ground to a nearby tree, settling on a higher branch. For several minutes, her cold hawk eyes surveyed our small group, her brown-speckled beige breast revealing itself. A big grin spread across Art’s face.



Arthur Moss releases “Big Girl”

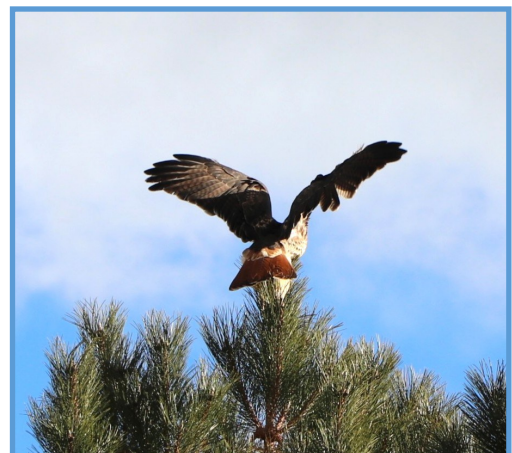
“It felt really good,” remembers Art. “It is a great feeling of relief to see a bird function like she normally would be doing.”

After a while, Big Girl flew to the tip-top of a tall neighboring tree. There she remained, like a star atop a Christmas tree, as her rescuers and releasers drove away.

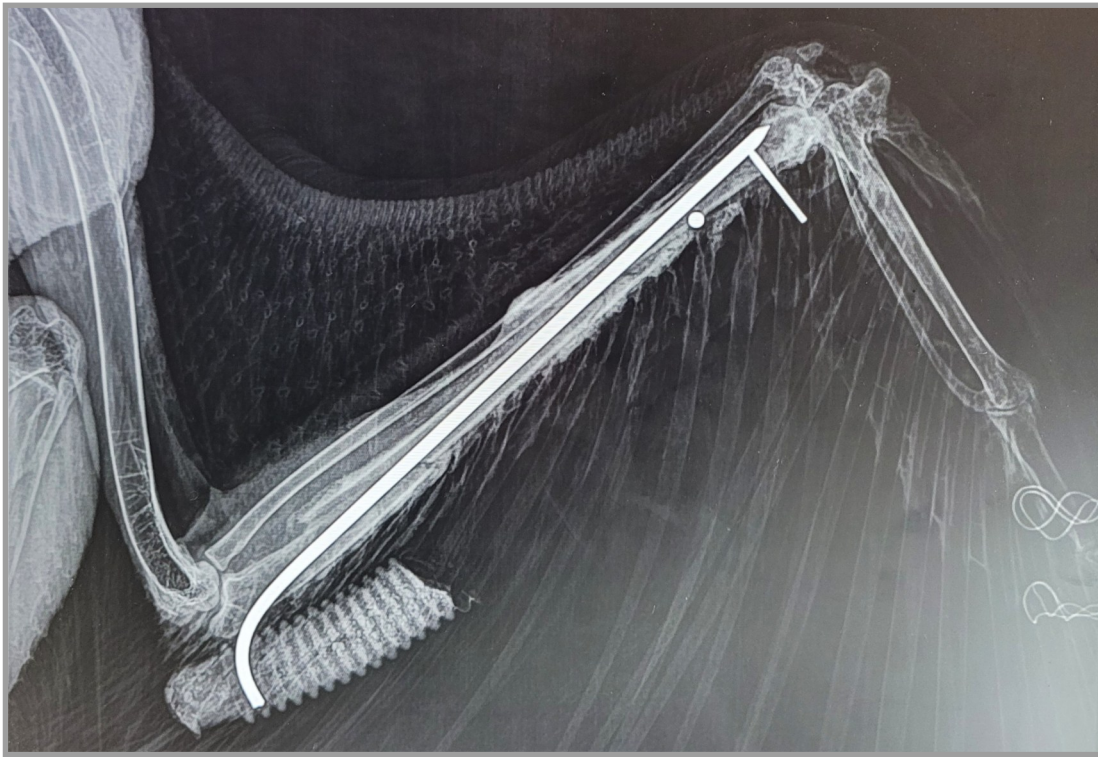
The smile on Art Moss’s face took a long while to fade.



“Big Girl” just prior to pitching upward to land on a branch seconds after release.



“Home, Sweet Home”
“Big Girl” takes a high perch to survey her old surroundings in South Weber.



Left: an X-ray of The Bald's right wing on his second visit to repair the brace he broke that was securing the pins meant to stabilize and repair several fractures.

The small white "ball" shape is a shotgun BB that entered the hollow of the ulna near the elbow.

The BB traveled up through the hollow bone causing multiple fractures before it came to rest just outside the bone, close to the bird's "wrist".

We continue to be amazed and saddened that there are people willing to illegally shoot any wildlife without proper permits, let alone our National Symbol the American Bald Eagle.

The large item (at the elbow) with the steel rod in it, is what was left of the brace after the Vet removed the broken portion that extended towards the bird's wrist.

Several Rehab facilities are working together to hopefully get this beautiful eagle back into the wild where it belongs.

Bald Eagle Endures Rough Recovery after Gunshot Wound

By Vanessa Zimmer

We have good news and bad news about the male Bald Eagle that's being treated for a gunshot wound at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah in Ogden.

The bad news first? He's full of attitude and feisty.

Now the good news: He's full of attitude and feisty.

The Bald, as he's come to be known at the WRCNU, "has been challenging us every step of the way," says executive director DaLyn Marthaler. But she means that in the nicest possible way: "He's got attitude and fight, which is great except when they're here," for treatment at the rehab center.

The eagle nobly carries on, despite the trauma that started when a shotgun pellet entered the underside of his wing and rattled up the hollow bone of his ulna, resulting in numerous fractures. He's weathered a domino of surgeries and reactions including vomiting and his feet swelling up like loaves of bread.

The journey started in late January when the WRCNU fielded a call from a resident in Salt Lake City who said she had a Bald Eagle in her backyard. Marthaler asked the caller to text a picture to confirm the identification due it being an unlikely place to find an eagle. After confirming it was a Bald Eagle and it was obviously in trouble, Marthaler contacted Michiko Berceau, a cofounder and rehabber with the *Wildlife Center of Salt Lake*, to help.

The bird was taken to the Parrish Creek Veterinary Hospital in Centerville, among the few avian-certified vets in the United States. There, on January 22, the surgeon inserted a metal rod in the hollow of the damaged ulna, attaching it at top and bottom with a parallel tube filled with resin to keep it stable. (See X-ray illustration.) It was a technique used successfully many times before. *Continued: The Bald pg. 4*

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Mailing Address: 3127 N Pelican Dr / Farr West, UT 84404 / www.WRCNU.org

Enter The Bald.

The Bald was transported to the WRCNU for continued care which consists of anesthetizing the bird every other day for range of motion exercises all while constantly monitoring heart rate and breathing.

On January 27, the WRCNU rehabbers heard a nauseating snap during therapy. Turns out, the resin tube had broken in the middle and at the top attachment.

On January 28, Parrish Creek operated, replacing the tube with one of a considerably larger diameter.

On February 9, the WRCNU discovered during therapy that The Bald had broken the tube once again, probably with his agitated bouncing in his enclosure.

On February 11, the broken tube was replaced for a second time.

On February 19, staff detected the screw holding the tube to the rod in the ulna had broken. The day before, they determined the screw was sliding in and out of the bone slightly. An examination and x-rays concluded enough healing had occurred that the entire pin inside the ulna could be pulled.

On February 28, a culture of the bone revealed the presence of a bacteria that was resistant to the antibiotic being used. A different, injectable antibiotic was prescribed.

On March 1, The Bald “vomited everything.” Thinking it might be a fluke, the staff fed him again. Again, he vomited and was put on an anti-nausea medication.

On March 3, The Bald received a new antibiotic that would attack the bacteria.

On March 5, attendants noticed the eagle’s feet were radically swollen. “We were terrified because often that will indicate there’s a heart issue,” says Marthaler. However, bloodwork suggested damage to The Bald’s liver, because of the reaction to the injectable antibiotic. Fluids were injected beneath the bird’s skin to help flush out the liver. The swelling dissipated within a few days.

On March 11, an anticipated surgery—expected because the break was so messy—addressed the bridging of bone between the radius and the ulna. The surgeon shaved down that bone and inserted a fat graft taken from The Bald’s thigh to keep the bone from bridging again. Without that step, the fused bones would prevent The Bald from extending his wing.

Now, therapy has resumed with the feisty Bald Eagle. And the WRCNU staff holds its collective breath that the graft will be The Bald’s last surgery. Once the healed right wing gains a full range of motion, strength training will begin. Marthaler expects he will go to the *Great Basin Wildlife Rehab* in Mapleton, which has bigger mews (raptor enclosures) for the bird to test his wings.

If all goes well, The Bald could be released in four to six weeks, Marthaler predicts.

The Bald is one of the most expensive birds the WRCNU has ever treated, says Marthaler, with “about 5 grand” invested. By the end of the project, three rehab centers in Utah will have contributed. But the expense and care are definitely worth it, she adds.

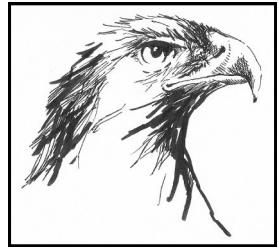
“Because humans did this to him, we have this obligation to right this wrong,” she says.



Left: Performing PT (physical therapy) under sedation to reduce stress and chance of re-injury.



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Continued on next page...

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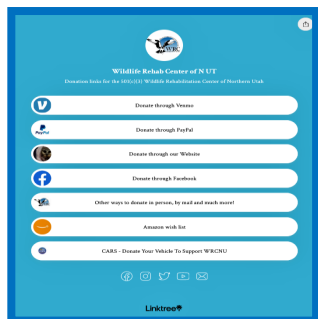
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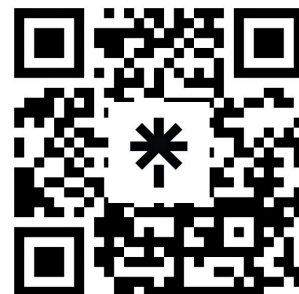
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- 2) **Donate your old vehicles** (cars/trucks/scooters/motorcycles/boats/RVs/etc.) through our partner CARS nonprofit. No cost to you, CARS schedules and does all the "heavy lifting" and provides a Tax Deductible receipt for your donation and sends WRCNU a nice check. See our link to the CARS donation form on our website's "Donate" tab (*scroll towards the bottom of the page*).
- 3) **Employer Matching**—many Businesses will double your gifts by matching your donations; Ask your employer if they have a Matching Gift Program. If WRCNU does not already have a program with your employer, it's still pretty easy. They will contact us by email and we will gladly enroll for the opportunity to double your gifts.
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Nest Destroyed during Excavation Work

This Desert Cottontail kit and a sibling required a few days to nurse from the bottle before it was ready to be weaned and it is now ready to go out on its own once there are several good weather days.

The nest of four (4) kits with mom was accidentally destroyed during an excavation project. Mom was killed, two had to be euthanized due to their injuries, but two (2) are thriving and ready for release.

A "Mixed Bag of Emotions" but in the end, two were saved!



First baby of the season arrived a bit early--this orphaned Uinta Chipmunk arrived from Summit County on March 20th.



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