

FALL 2005



NEWSLETTER OF THE ILLINOIS RAPTOR CENTER

# Wingover

## To our supporters ...

I've been staring at the note in my inbox for a week now. It's from a good friend from my college days, and I've been waiting until I have enough time to write a really meaningful reply, not just dash off a few lines.

In a way, I feel like our newsletter is a bit like that unwritten note to a friend. We've had our noses so close to the grindstone here at the center that we've neglected to stay in touch with the people that matter most to us - you.

This newsletter is a chance to get back in touch and back on track with those who have supported us through countless struggles over the past 11 years.

But there is a positive spin to all of this. Though fundraising is a constant challenge, we decided long ago that we wanted to spend our time on the center's mission of wildlife rehabilitation, education and habitat restoration. Here are just some of the things that have kept us so busy:

- Jack and Jane conducted 117 educational programs before 17,000 people last year. The fees earned by those programs provides substantial financial support to the center.

- The Illinois Conservation Foundation recently awarded the IRC a grant for \$4,400 to help us upgrade the buildings where our educational birds live.

- The habitat restoration program on our 15-acre property is an unqualified success. The land is healing itself at a rate faster than we could have hoped.

- Development of on-site programs continues. Two fundraising nature photography workshops netted \$800 this summer.

- Our Web site continues to reach more and more people - an estimated 200,000 visitors a year. An online gift shop is in the works. Hopefully, we can have an item or two for sale before Christmas.

As you mull over the other thoughts and ideas presented in this newsletter, it will become apparent that we have immersed ourselves completely in the task of making Illinois a better, greener, more fulfilling place to live.

We hope that even though we've been away from your mailbox, we've managed to stay close to your heart.

*Chris Young  
IRC Board President*



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The Illinois Raptor Center will hold its annual Owl Prowl Fundraiser October 28- 30 from 7:00 to 9:00 PM each evening (doors will open at 6:45 PM). Participants are asked to bring a flashlight and wear weather appropriate clothing for a short hike to the Sangamon River to call in owls.

The Owl Prowl is the only program of its kind in the state to incorporate nearly every owl that nests or migrates through Illinois into one presentation – all live and up close. Refreshments will be served after the hike. The cost is \$15.00 per person and \$7.50 for children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Seating is limited. For more information or to make reservations, phone **217-963-6909** or e-mail us at [illinoisraptorcenter@insightbb.com](mailto:illinoisraptorcenter@insightbb.com).

# The true measure of success

by Jane Seitz, Executive Director

Last week I was looking over wildlife admission and release records and nearly burst into tears. For the last couple years, the majority of patients being admitted to our hospital are so badly injured that they are simply beyond help. What happened to the days when we had healthy animals and a 75% release rate? As I sat feeling like a complete failure, I was hit by a flash of what should have been obvious to me.

There have been many times in our 15 years that the number of animals admitted in a single year was well over 1,000. The numbers prove that the IRC serves a significant need in our community. However, a few years ago, there came a day when the numbers became overwhelming. A day when there wasn't a cage, pet carrier, box or bucket that didn't have an animal in it. There wasn't enough time in the day for the care that was needed, and moreover, we estimated that 75% of the animals should never

have been rescued at all!

It was that day that Jacques and I came to the revelation that we needed to educate the public on when and when not to rescue wildlife. We set out to make sure that every animal that came into our facility truly needed rescued.

As discreetly as we could, step by step, we closed our doors to "walk-ins" and became adamant that people call before rescuing an animal. Over the years, Jacques and I have become remarkably good at being able to identify an animal by a caller's description or even by where they found the animal. Through our experiences and knowledge of natural history, we are able to help people through even the most difficult wildlife situations and, more times than not, the animal does not have to be rescued.

It was last week, looking through those records, that made me realize that of the 1,000 wild

animals that would typically have been rescued this year, only the 25% that REALLY needed to be rescued came through the center's doors. These are the animals that are in the worst situations and have the worst prospects of ever being released back into the wild. What should have been obvious to me is that the 75% that we helped to keep in the wild are the true measure of our success!

I am proud that the number of wildlife patients we serve has become considerably less over the years because this is surely proof that our educational and environmental message is getting out. It is through your generous donations that we have been able to serve the people and wildlife of Illinois for the last 15 years. You keep the phones connected and the lights on — and so much more.

Thank you so much.



## From the mews to the news

Beautiful Yeti — the center's Snowy Owl — graced the cover of the July 14-20 issue of the *Illinois Times*, in which Editor Roland Klose said, "Relying on donations and volunteer help, the center has become an important resource for public education about these birds, and founder Jane Seitz and program director Jacques Nuzzo deserve our thanks."

The article was written by IRC volunteer Celeste Huttes. To read the article online, visit [www.illinoistimes.com](http://www.illinoistimes.com) and search on "Illinois Raptor Center."

# It's just my nature

By Jacques Nuzzo

For as long as I can remember, I have loved the outdoors. I grew up that way because I was taught that way. There were many people who were behind me, encouraging me to appreciate the natural world. Through their teachings I have made my home among the prairies and woods of Illinois. I have been amazed by the beauty and landscapes of distant places, but for me, the good old Sangamon River Basin will always be the most beautiful place. I have been on many adventures in the outdoors; and look forward to many more days spent in the wilds.

In my adventures there is always a bird of prey. I've seen red-tailed hawks fight great blue herons on the Sangamon River. I've seen kestrels hunt in what is now the Steak-N-Shake parking lot in Forsyth. I've watched barred owls glide silently from tree to tree before there was any bike trail between Fairview and Rock Springs. Eagles, ospreys and peregrine falcons ... all I have seen right here in Macon county.

My mother gave me the freedom to explore the woods behind the house I grew up in. My grandma taught me why

birds were so beautiful. My grandfather taught me how to appreciate the art of fishing. My father helped me with the scouting skills I needed to hike, camp, canoe and venture off into the wilderness. And my brother was always my faithful sidekick in all our adventures. Because of these people, and the things they taught me — carved into my soul — my dress shoes continue to gather dust in the closet and my hiking shoes don't look right without mud on them.

There came a day when I felt that the things that I had seen and experienced had to be shared. All that was taught to me and all that I had

experienced had to be passed on to someone. I decided to show those around me the things that make my eyes pop out in excitement. Trees, nests, birds, rotten logs, glowing stumps (fox fire) — all these things passed on to those who would listen. The Boy Scouts of America gave me the opportunity and the skills necessary to teach young people about the natural world.

But there was that distant call of hawks in the sky. Something more loomed ahead.



The Illinois Raptor Center was the next step. The opportunities it offered were endless. It was no coincidence that I wound up here. Teaching during our Education on the Wing programs is the highlight of my life. Taking

magnificent birds of prey to people and showing their place in their lives, is an opportunity of a lifetime. I have sat on the ground, between two bald eagles, and played with them and learned from them. Folks, no matter what you do in life, it doesn't get any better than that.

No matter how much you donate, it is you, the contributor, that has taught me and gave me the new tools I need to spread the knowledge that I have. Because of you, last year we did a record 117 programs in the state of Illinois. This year we are even heading into other states to do programs. You are the driving force behind our lives. Your dedication, faith and love for what we do keep this going. And it adds another chapter to a life that I believe is a great one, with so much more up ahead.

*"I have sat between two bald eagles and played with them and learned from them ...it doesn't get any better than that."*

# Spreading our wings ...

by Celeste Huttes

I have always been fascinated and inspired by people who might be described as “self-actualized.” You know the type -- driven by a clear vision for their life, doing work they love, engaged with the world around them. Unlike many of us, these people don’t spend much time wishing they were doing something else. The way I see it, self-actualized people have learned to spread their wings and soar.

I took a step in the self-actualized direction earlier this year when I left my corporate job to pursue a career as a freelance writer. Since I didn’t exactly have stacks of writing projects awaiting me at the time, I decided to volunteer my services to an organization I had admired for years: the Illinois Raptor Center. Jane and Jacques welcomed me with open arms, glad for a little help with grantwriting and this newsletter.

The more time I spend with Jane and Jacques, the more I learn about the environment, conservation, raptors and other wildlife — and people. Without knowing it, these two are also teaching me about self-actualization, simply by living it.

As you probably know by now, Jane and Jacques are passionate about the work they do.

That passion has kept them going for 15 years, working some very long days, not to mention weekends and holidays. It has carried them through difficult and sometimes dangerous rescues, including massive efforts like rescuing animals affected by the 1993 Mississippi flood.

Every single day, without fail, they care for the center’s



wounded residents, from feeding and cleaning to medical treatments – even an amazing, delicate technique called “imping,” where feathers the center has collected over the years are carefully crafted into an artificial tail or wing for an injured bird.

Unfortunately, they also have to make heartbreaking decisions and too often face the harsh reality that sometimes no amount of help is enough.

Jane and Jacques are road warriors too. They regularly travel throughout the state to educate

people about wildlife conservation, with the help of their majestic wildlife ambassadors. Though they will not fly free again, these educational birds are soaring in a different way, as they open our eyes to the natural wonders in our own backyards.

As a new member of the extended IRC family, I would like to thank you for the support you have given the center. Your gifts allow Jane and Jacques to share their inner gifts with animals in need – and with us – to make our world a better place.

Having brought orphaned and injured animals to the Illinois Raptor Center over the years, it is a comfort to know that people like Jane and Jacques are there to lend help beyond what I could give.

We should all be so lucky to taste self-actualization in the way that Jane and Jacques seem to. And we should all be so lucky to have people like them around to lift us up when we can no longer soar on our own.

We are so pleased to have Celeste Huttes, a freelance writer, join our staff of professional volunteers. She can be reached at [celeste.write4u@sbcglobal.net](mailto:celeste.write4u@sbcglobal.net) or at 217-876-1164. Thank you, Celeste!

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**Our donors help us soar!  
From the bottom of our hearts:**

*Thank You*

# Gone ... but not forgotten

By Jacques Nuzzo

There is a truth about the world that we live in that you can learn very well from animals. That truth is that life comes to an end. We have spent many years saving the lives of animals, just as we feel we are saving the lives of ecosystems and habitats. This ensures the bounties of nature will remain for present and future generations, so in a way, maybe we are saving at least a piece of peoples' lives, every day.

But too often, we are faced with the grim fact that living things die.

We primarily work with raptors; through them we have seen the truth about the natural world in many ways. It has made us somber and reverent towards death, and every once in awhile we suffer a loss that hurts us down to the soul.

It has taken me a year to even get these words out. Last year during our last Owl Prowl, we lost one of the greatest birds that our Education on the Wing program has ever seen. Shawnee, our beloved Short-Eared Owl died from old age just before her appearance in the program's owl lineup. Those who knew of this bird, and had been to the prowls before, knew something was wrong.

Until that day, there wasn't a single program that Shawnee had not been part of. She was featured in many articles. She was my favorite bird of prey, maybe because she had been with me for 11 years. She lived in my grandmother's house before we



even had a mew for her. She lived in my hotel room while doing programs for the City of Chicago, at Navy Pier. I will never forget being awoken by a "barking" short-eared owl at 6:00 a.m. standing on my chest. (Best alarm clock I ever had.) Her loss was devastating to me, and the program. We do have another

Short-eared Owl – Tecumseh, who has been with us a few years. She will replace Shawnee in our programs, but those are big shoes to fill.

Shawnee was buried in the newly established prairie. We found it the most fitting place to

put her to rest, since she is truly a prairie owl. She is sorely missed.

We also lost two other birds during the year. Our tiny Saw-whet Owl passed also from age. "Chigger," the smallest owl on our staff, will be very hard to replace. Saw-whets are rarely seen in the wild, let alone in an educational program.

Coates, our Bald Eagle, died mysteriously this summer. Death is easier to accept when you can see it or have a feeling that it will come soon (in the case of old birds). But Coates was young and his death unexpected and sudden. A necropsy report showed that he had a bacterial infection in his lungs, one that we had no idea was there, and probably would have never known was there. He died in a short span of time, catching us completely off-guard. This still haunts us, for it shakes our confidence somewhat.



Just when you think you have a handle on things, something sudden strikes. Another lesson death has taught us.

Last but not least, "The Ground Hog" -- not our live animal, but our old beat up truck -- finally gave way. I feel its loss every time I have to haul a ton of stuff around the property. I miss that old truck, and even though it wasn't a living thing, it had done so much and been with us so long it deserves our thanks, with bowed heads.

We will miss our friends -- animal, human, and machine. We will cherish their memories and the things they did for us, for the lives of all those around them. May they find peace and happiness wherever they may be right now.



# The year in pictures



# Generous donor gives IRC budget a 20-year boost

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What do you say to someone who gives you a generous gift but doesn't want to be acknowledged? How do you thank them? How do you tell the world how wonderful they are if they want to remain anonymous? How do you let them know how grateful you are for the trust and confidence they have bestowed upon you? You don't know the answer? Neither do we! Nonetheless, that is what has happened at the IRC.

A fantastic, conservation-minded, down-to-earth person with a big, charitable heart came forward at the beginning of this year to set up a "maintenance fund" for the IRC - not only for this year but for the next 20 years! Beyond that, the IRC also received a 2005 diesel Jeep Liberty from this wonderful friend! HOW DO YOU THANK SOMEONE FOR SUCH AN UNBELIEVABLE GIFT?

The center is changed forever because of this gift. It is allowing us to repair equipment and buy new equipment we didn't think we could ever afford. For the first time, it is allowing us to plan ahead! These plans include running water service to the barn and building new mews and a shed where Education on the Wing equipment and carriers will be stored. This donor's generosity has given us more stability than we've ever had before.

This generous gift could not have come at a better time. This was the year that anything with a motor broke down (including the pencil sharpener); anything related to our well water blew up or started leaking, and the mower spent more time in the shop than in the grass.

Here are just a few of the items the maintenance fund covered for us this year:

- New watering hoses, outdoor faucet and power washer (what a time saver!)
- Lawn mower repairs and new tires

- Mew improvements (locks, shade cloth, new perches and gravel)
- Vehicle maintenance and repairs, including new tires and battery for *Education on the Wing* van
- Repairs/upgrades to main building (A/C, water heater, well tank, faucet, heaters, new lock, etc.)
- Replacing aging computers, printer, and answering machine
- Storage cabinet for medical supplies and new table
- Carriers, nest boxes and mews
- Wheelbarrows,
- ...And much more!

As an unexpected benefit, this gift has freed up operation money that has allowed us to offer the center's first paid position! It is a blessing to be able to actually "hire" Jacques and keep him here at the center. He has volunteered for the IRC for over 15 years, receiving only small stipends for Education on the Wing programs and now he is officially our first paid employee!

Not only is this fund helping the center but it is helping all our other contributors. Thanks to the maintenance fund, your donations will go directly to feeding and caring for the animals and helping expand our educational programs to help keep wildlife in the wild.

What can we say to our anonymous donor? "Thank you" certainly isn't enough. We can only hope that this generous person knows how deeply they are appreciated and that their gift will touch the hearts and souls of wildlife and the people of this community far into the future. From the bottom of our hearts ... **Thank you.**



*And if that mockingbird don't fly ...*

*... the IRC will find out why*

For the first time, the IRC took a baby mockingbird under its wing. With a little help from his new friends, he prepares for flight, perched on a staff member's finger just prior to release.



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Ever the educational bird, our Snowy Owl Yeti was happy to help train our intern, Miranda Schuett, this summer. Miranda is studying biology at Millikin University.

*"Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you."*

— Frank Lloyd Wright