

# Impact of a Docent

While strolling through the National Aviary's Tropical Forest Exhibit on a Saturday afternoon, you may have had the pleasure of speaking with docent Chandler Ketchum. The Tropical Forest was one of Chandler's regular stations while volunteering his time at the Aviary. You would often find him with a clipboard or palm pilot in hand assisting the trainers by tallying birds for the daily census. There are over 600 birds at the Aviary to be accounted for every day with almost 100 of these birds reside in the Tropical Forest. Chandler would patiently tally each of the nine pied imperial pigeons, the African jacana, three Dhyal thrushes, and even the small and elusive Kikuyu white-eyes. Some birds were easier to find than others but as the birds became more familiar with Chan, they would come down to visit him while he was on duty. Shrek, the white-cheeked turaco, would sit on the railing next to Chandler's wheelchair. The Victoria crowned pigeons always stopped by to visit.

Though physically challenged and in a wheelchair, Chan's spirit was anything but. His positive attitude toward life and his passion for the Aviary and its occupants were contagious. This spirit was recognized by birds, staff and guests alike. Chandler would spend hours in the Tropical Forest sharing facts with guests about the exhibit's flock. In true docent form, he would also answer questions about birds found throughout the Aviary.

Chan wasn't always comfortable with guest interaction. When he first joined the National Aviary's volunteer staff in 2006, he was reserved with guests and preferred blending in with his bird friends. Eventually as Chandler came to know the diverse flock, he began to open up with Aviary guests. He connected with visitors on many levels. On

one occasion, in knowing of a shared interest in photography, a guest purchased a mini tripod for Chandler. Chandler demonstrated his chivalry with his reluctance to accept the gift. He checked with Aviary staff and was assured that he could accept the unsolicited item.



Another way that Chan connected with birds was through enrichment projects. The Aviary strives to provide stimulating environments for its captive flock so that birds (and our sloth!) can demonstrate their natural behaviors. Chandler was an active member of the volunteer enrichment committee, which make toys for our parrots and cricket boxes for other species. He would also help in the kitchen by creating special seasonal food treats, like a pumpkin garnished with various fruits and vegetables, or fruit skewers to hang in the free-flight exhibits.

Sadly, the Aviary has lost a good friend. On Tuesday, October 28, while on his way to school, Chandler was in an automobile accident that ultimately took his life. Staff and volunteers were shocked by the loss. At his memorial, many paid their respects to Chan and his family, even African penguins Simon and Patrick. Today, the Ketchum family ensures that Chan's memory will live on at the Aviary through their continued support of Aviary events. Chandler is greatly missed but will never be forgotten.



## DELMARVA BIRDING WEEKEND 2009!

The new year is already upon us and spring migration is just a few short months away. Make plans to head east April 22-26, 2009 to the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware and Virginia for another exciting long weekend of bird-watching, hiking, canoeing and kayaking during the Delmarva Birding Weekend. Last year, the National Aviary partnered with this amazing event, and 2009 is "shore" to be another winner! Our Director of Animal Programs, Steve Sarro, will be leading a number of the tours. Warblers, raptors, shorebirds and many other species will be seen as they wing north to their breeding grounds. For additional information go to ["delmarvabirdingweekend.org"](http://delmarvabirdingweekend.org) or contact Steve Sarro at 412 323-7235, x211.

# A Winter Wonderland for Wildlife

With cold days and a limited food supply, winter is the hardest time of the year for birds and other wildlife. You can do a few simple things to make your yard into a haven for wildlife in the long winter months by providing for animals' three basic needs – food, water, and shelter. Once you get to know some of your wild neighbors, you might even want to provide for a fourth need in the spring – a safe place to raise young, such as a birdhouse. Turning your yard into a backyard habitat not only gives wildlife a safe place to call home, it also brings nature right to your door to observe and enjoy.

## Food

Birds need a lot of food to stay warm and they rely heavily on high-calorie foods like sunflower seeds and suet to make it through the cold winter days. Feeding the birds can be as simple as putting some seed mix onto a tray in the snow, or as complex as setting up elaborate seed and suet feeders around your yard. There are just a few things to keep in mind:

- Place feeders five to 12 feet away from bushes and ground cover – this allows birds to fly or dash to safety if need be, but does not allow ground predators, such as cats, to sneak up too close to the feeder.
- Make sure to clean your feeder regularly and check that your seed is fresh – old or moldy seed is bad for the birds.
- Once you've decided to feed the birds, keep your feeder full. The birds in your area will come to rely on you and the food your yard provides.

One of the easiest types of feeders you can make at home is a pinecone feeder. It's a great project for kids on a chilly day. Just take a large pinecone and spread vegetable shortening or suet (unrendered animal fat that can be purchased at the butcher's counter) all over the pinecone. Then roll it in seeds of your choice (black oil sunflower seeds are a favorite!), attach a string to the pinecone's stem, and hang it outside for wildlife. It may take them a while to find it, but your pinecone feeder will be a welcome treat in the middle of winter. You can make a similar feeder using half of a stale bagel. You might find black-capped chickadees, tufted titmice, woodpeckers or even a hungry squirrel at this feeder!



## Water

Water is another necessity for winter wildlife. Simply offer a shallow dish of water daily, or provide a heated drinking bowl so that your visitors can have a drink all winter long. Most birds won't bathe during the winter, but drinking water is a must.

## Shelter

In the cold winter months, having a place to get out of the snow is important for wildlife. Consider planting hardy native plant species in your yard. Many native plants also have fruits or seeds that wildlife will eat. For a list of native species that are good choices for wildlife, check the National Wildlife Federation website at [www.nwf.org/backyard](http://www.nwf.org/backyard).

*If you would like more information about turning your backyard into a haven for wildlife, please go to [www.nwf.org/backyard](http://www.nwf.org/backyard).*

## Winter Sale in the Gift Shop

January 5 - February 28

Get bargain prices on summer and winter items including ornaments, books, home decor and garden fixtures. Shop early for the best selection!

Visit the National Aviary's new e-store at [www.aviary.org](http://www.aviary.org)



## Flight Camp 2009

Fee: \$175 members/ \$195 non-members

<b>Ages 6-8</b>	<b>July 13-17</b>
9 am-3 pm Mon-Thurs; 9 am-4 pm Friday	
<b>Ages 9-11</b>	<b>July 20-24</b>
9 am-3 pm Mon-Thurs; 9 am-4 pm Friday	
<b>Ages 12-14</b>	<b>July 27-31</b>
9 am-3 pm Mon-Thurs; 9 am-4 pm Friday	

Ever wonder what it takes to fly high in the sky? What better place than the National Aviary to answer that question and more during our 2009 Flight Camp! We will explore all the mysteries of natural and artificial flight at the National Aviary, Carnegie Science Center, and Challenger Learning Center. Learn how planes are designed and what aeronautics engineers have learned about flight from birds. Explore and test all the cool principles of physics that are needed to fly in the sky and even in space. To register, please call 412.323.7235 ext. 209. Pre and post-care is available for a nominal fee.

**NEW!**

## Preschool Half-Day Camp

**Ages 4 & 5 / June 15-19**  
9 am-12 pm Mon - Fri

What's in an egg? Why do birds have feathers? Do parrots really eat crackers? Make some feathery friends at the National Aviary's NEW Summer Day Camp for four and five year-olds! Campers will learn what makes birds unique through games, crafts, stories and up-close visits from Aviary birds. Snacks will be provided. To register, please call 412-323-7235 ext. 209.



# Study of Raptors in Kazakhstan

## Fosters International Partnerships and Understanding

Halfway around the world, in an area of the former Soviet Republic that many would be slow to identify outside, perhaps, the 2006 film *Borat*, an international partnership is quietly being formed.

Crossing borders and cultures, researchers from the United States and Kazakhstan are collaborating to gain insight into the demographics of white-tailed sea eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and red-footed falcons (*Falco vespertinus*), two threatened species of raptors for which little to no scientific data exists. Their goals: to identify new ways to study these rare species, provide information that can be critical to their conservation, and in the process, foster international understanding and collaboration.

The project, which is being led by Dr. Todd Katzner, National Aviary Director of Conservation & Field Research; Dr. Evgeny A. Bragin, a senior scientist at the Naurzum Nature Reserve in Kazakhstan; and Dr. J. Andrew DeWoody, Associate Professor of Genetics at Purdue University; has been made possible through a \$45,000 grant from the U.S. Civilian Research & Development Foundation (CRDF), a nonprofit established by the National Science Foundation to advance peace and prosperity through civilian research and development projects.

"The unique partnerships the National Aviary is developing with the Kostanay Pedagogical Institute and the Naurzum Nature Reserve are critical components of both an expanded and successful conservation research program, and of the growth and peaceful development of this economically and socially important part of the world," says Katzner.

Over the next two years, Katzner and his fellow researchers will employ non-invasive techniques to monitor and evaluate populations of white-tailed sea eagles and

red-footed falcons in this distant former Soviet republic, where deforestation, agropesticide use and habitat loss due to human population growth are threatening the survival of wildlife and the area's ecosystem. Rather than capturing, tagging and banding birds, the team will conduct genetic studies of shed feathers that will be collected at nesting and foraging sites.

The information gathered through analysis of non-invasively collected feathers will provide novel insight into the population dynamics of these rare species. Katzner and his colleagues were the first to apply these techniques to the study of birds, when they focused on the eastern imperial eagle (*Aquila heliaca*). Their work provided the first ever evaluation of mortality rates of this species, a population statistic that is critical to conservation of any species.

"Long-established methods of monitoring, such as banding and counting birds, do not always offer a complete picture of the viability of a population," says Katzner. "Birds of prey are apex predators – those at the top of the food chain – and as such, they are often impacted by environmental changes or contaminants. When environmental poisoning occurs, the birds' conservation status can change quickly, often too quickly for traditional methods of population monitoring to track before it's too late.

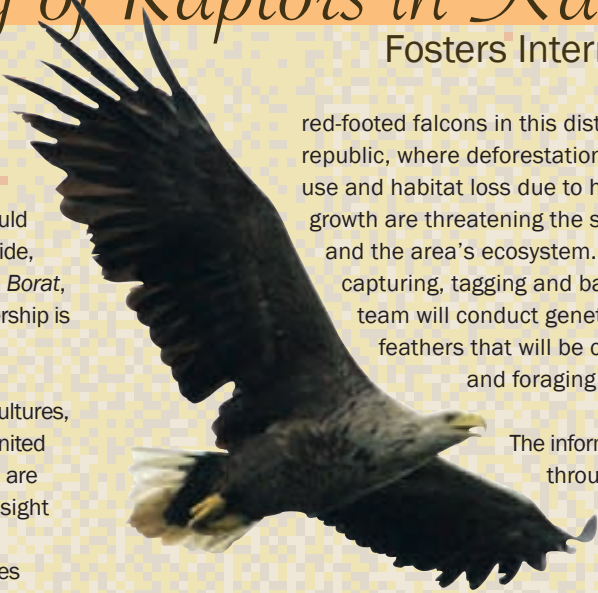
"In the case of the American bald eagle, the chemicals in DDT did not kill the adult birds – in the short term their numbers appeared stable. Rather, it caused thinning of their egg shells. The shells would crack and break before the chicks had the chance to hatch and, as a result, the bald eagle population was almost eradicated in a very short period of time because the population was not reproducing. DDT was also affecting other less visible aspects of the environment, but the eagles were the indicators of wider-ranging impacts."

"Information gathered through banding alone can also be insufficient because

raptors are difficult to observe and hard to capture and mark in significant numbers," adds Katzner. "The limited information collected can lead to false and potentially fatal conclusions regarding the stability of critically endangered populations."

Non-invasive study also provides opportunity to provide other information about birds beyond their population dynamics. Previous study of imperial eagles showed that they are more likely to be monogamous than most other birds and that the birds at Naurzum are most often born in other places, but disperse to the reserve. Katzner and his colleagues expect to study many of these same things in white-tailed sea eagles and red-footed falcons at Naurzum.

"Our work in Kazakhstan will provide unique information that is critical to conservation of these rare and remarkable birds. By pioneering new approaches to research and conservation, and by forming collaborative partnerships with researchers in North America and around the world, the National Aviary promotes a better understanding of how continued growth in human populations and resource consumption is impacting our fragile but resilient planet."



## White-tailed sea eagle

The white-tailed sea eagle is a large eagle with a distribution that extends throughout the northern Palearctic, from the British Isles to Kamchatka. It is, in many regards, the ecological equivalent of its closely related cousin, the North American bald eagle. Like most sea eagles, it breeds in trees or occasionally on cliffs and forages on a diverse diet that includes fish, seabirds and a variety of terrestrial birds and mammals. These impressive looking birds have broad wings, a large head, and a thick and powerful yellow beak. Adults are mainly brown, with a paler head and neck, blackish flight feather and distinctive white tail.



Photo by Dr. Todd Katzner

## Red-footed falcon

The red-foot falcon is a small raptor with a geographic distribution that extends from eastern Europe to northern central Asia. Unlike many larger raptors, it is a long-distance migrant that winters in Africa, from South Africa to Kenya. Red-footed falcons have a large global population but recent evidence suggests that the species is declining throughout much of its range (BirdLife International, 2008). Like many other similarly sized falcons in Eurasia, red-footed falcons breed in forested patches and forage in open fields near their nest sites. No falcons build their own nests, and red-footed falcons most often usurp nests from rooks (*Corvus frugilegus*) or other Corvids.

Red-footed falcons are sexually dimorphic in plumage, with males displaying relatively high levels of ornamentation. Their legs, cere, eyes and rump are brightly colored and highly visible, suggesting extensive competition among males for mates. Their diet consists primarily of lizards (*Lacerta spp.*) and insects of many types.



Photo by Erin Estell

## Thank you for supporting our three 2008 fundraisers!

2008 was an incredibly exciting year, complete with expansion plans, new bird shows and three successful fundraising events.

**Night in the Tropics**, our annual summer fiesta, was a sold-out sensation! With Huntington Bank as the title sponsor, we raised over \$50,000. Thirty local restaurants fed the 600 partygoers, while the Freedom Band and DJ Carlton entertained the crowd. Join us for this year's **Night in the Tropics** on July 25, 2009.



More than 750 guests attended the **Feathered Jewels Gala** in September to celebrate our upcoming expansion and to enjoy our birds' aerial acrobatics. The event transformed the Hunt Armory in Shadyside into a majestic space that echoed the magic of our new theater. With National City Bank as the title sponsor, the event raised over \$300,000.



In November we celebrated the groundbreaking of Penguin Point, our new African penguin exhibit, with a bash hosted by the Pittsburgh Penguins. The Penguins' General Manager, Ray Shero, and his wife Karen, did the honor of putting the first shovel to the ground. With the help of our hosts, the event raised over \$10,000 for the new exhibit.

