



# Flights of Fancy Newsletter

## *On Eagles' Wings*

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February 7, 2009. A beautiful, warm, sunny day, so rare for late winter in Kansas. In front of a crowd hundreds strong, Ken Lockwood from Eagle Valley Raptor Center walked slowly toward the cleared space by the Arkansas River. In his hands, he held a hooded bald eagle.

The eagle was called, rather fittingly, "Trapper John," because of the terrible way he'd been found: Limping along on the ground, a heavy steel coyote trap clamped tightly to his leg. It was more than incongruous, it was horribly wrong, this beautiful majestic creature

of the sky bound viciously and painfully to the earth.

Trapper was a lucky one. The trap, though deadly, had not damaged him as severely as it might have. His bones were not broken, the tendons intact. He healed quickly. Quickly enough that within two weeks he was deemed healthy and suitable for release.

"He tried to rip my face off," joked Ken. "That was all the answer I needed!"

Standing among the gathered public that Saturday were members of the Patriot Guard. Their flag-bedecked motorcycles stood in quiet sentinel behind them. They were there not only to honor the release of the eagle, but also to remember

their friend, brother, and founding member Greg Hansen. The eagle was being released in his honor.

Together, Greg's brother Scott and his widow Georgianna pulled the ties that held the hood on the eagle's head. As soon as it was released, the bird became alive, his yellow eyes snapping up to glare at Ken. One got the feeling that, despite all the man had done, the eagle didn't like him very much.

"Just the way it's supposed to be," Ken said.

Prompted by Ken, the audience chanted aloud. "One, two, three...SET HIM FREE!" With that, Ken tossed the once stricken bird up into the air. To the cheers and whoops of the throng, the eagle spread his wings and flapped away, away from the noise, the crowd, the humans. Away from all of us, back to where he belonged. On eagles' wings.

**Moment of Truth: Trapper John spreads his wings and embraces freedom.**



Photo credit: Fernando Salazar, Wichita Eagle



**Lead shot has been banned for waterfowl hunting in the United States since 1991. However, cases like Denali's are still common enough to tell us that stricter measures are needed to keep lead from being ingested by raptors and other predatory species. Urge your representatives to draft laws to eliminate lead shot and save animal's lives.**

## Getting the Lead Out: Denali Update

For a bird once within literally hours of death, flying across Eagle Valley's 110-foot flight pen is more than just an accomplishment. It's a miracle.

"Denali," as he's now known, is doing well. The lead shot he'd consumed while eating on a waterfowl killed, but not retrieved by, hunters, has been eliminated from his system. Now he just has to overcome the damage left behind.

"He had lost most of his sight, his internal organs were failing, his muscled had wasted away,"

reports Ken Lockwood. "It's a slow way to die. Not pleasant at all."

But he can see again. He can find the food Ken leaves for him. He can peer out between the wooden slats of his pen at the sunlight, the grasses, and the trees. He can fly from one perch to another, with flight pen resident Wasu looking on. Wasu seems pleased that Denali is improving. But don't mistake his attitude for happiness at the outcome; he just doesn't want to share his do-

main any longer than necessary.

But the road to recovery is still long. Denali's stamina isn't good, his muscles are weak. "He gets out of breath, huffing and puffing," reports Ken. Plus he has some possible tendon damage in one of his feet. But that can't be fully evaluated unless—until—his health improves.

So for now, it's back to exercise and regular doctor visits for Denali. Wasu will just have to share for a little longer.

## An Ounce of Prevention...

We're thrilled, of course, that we were successful in our quest to heal Trapper and return him to the wild. We're sure those watching that Saturday were equally thrilled with seeing him fly over their heads, powerful and strong, the way nature intended. We're sure that this bird's release meant so much to so many.

It didn't have to be this way. In fact, this eagle shouldn't have been released at all. He shouldn't have *needed* to be released. He never should have been injured in the first place.

The life of a wild eagle, or any animal, is dangerous. Starva-

tion, disease, predation—all is part of nature and is to be expected. These things happen. Eagles die.

But Trapper didn't succumb to a disease. He didn't fail because he wasn't a good hunter, or because he broke a wing in a fight with another eagle. He was injured because a human set a coyote trap in an area with known eagles, and baited it with a freshly killed rabbit.

He may as well have snapped the trap on the bird's leg himself. Would you turn down a \$100 bill if you were hungry?

There are things we humans can do to reduce our impact on wildlife. Traps like that need

to be set with more care, camouflaged from above so hunting eagle eyes don't see them.

Lead bullets might not have been shot at Denali, our other injured eagle, but the damage they are doing is just as great. Nontoxic steel shot is available and is used by millions of responsible hunters.

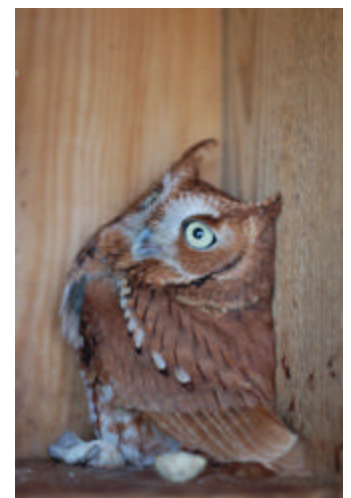
Animals have just as much right as we do to live happy, healthy lives. They shouldn't need to rely on us to save them, especially when we're the ones that cause the problems.

Let's make sure they won't need our help in the first place.

### Did You Know...?

**Lead shot just doesn't hurt animals. A 2008 study showed that people who ate the meat of animals shot with lead shot had higher levels of lead in their blood than people who ate little or no wild game meat.**

**Two years ago, we rescued a little screech owl just like Tidbit (pictured to the right) who had become caught in a sticky glue trap meant for mice. It's important that we are careful about the things we introduce to our environment, including our very own front yards. You never know who or what might get hurt.**



## A Nose...er, Bill...for Trouble

There was a full moon recently. That's the only explanation I can think of for the bizarre case of a second bird caught in a trap meant for another species.

Imagine our surprise when just two days after releasing Trapper John, the eagle who'd tangled with a coyote trap, Eagle Valley received a frantic call from a woman about a duck in distress. Now, normally, we don't work with waterfowl

species. We're not set up to properly care for them. But this poor girl had bitten off more than she could chew...or, rather, the trap had bitten off just enough so she *couldn't* chew.

The photo on the right shows what EVRC Director Ken Lockwood found when he arrived on the scene: a duck with its bill caught fast in a muskrat trap.

Luckily for Ken, this duck was

considerably more mild in temperament than Trapper John had been. He was able to release the trap and free the captured mallard.

"Tenille" wasn't hurt badly at all. After a quick examination, Ken let her go and she swam right for the water, wagging her tail in appreciation and quacking happily.

Now that's just ducky.



**Meet Trapper Joe, the third injured bald eagle we've received so far in 2009 and the second to have sustained injuries as a result of a poorly-set animal trap.**

Did I say "full moon" in the previous article? I was wrong. This is worse than a full moon. This is the Twilight Zone.

## Trouble Always Comes in How Many?

One week after the duck-billed rescue, Ken received yet another call on another bird caught in another trap.

It's another eagle. He was found with his foot lodged in a beaver trap. Check out the

photo collection at left and below for the story of "Trapper Joe, Cousin of Trapper John."



**Here is Trapper Joe's injury. The soft tissue on the top of the foot has been damaged, but the bones are not broken and the tendons appear to be fine.**



**The injury needs to be cleaned and treated daily. Here, Dr. Davey Harkins swabs out the inside of the laceration and applies an antibiotic.**

## Eagle Valley Raptor Center

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[www.eaglevalleyraptorcenter.org](http://www.eaglevalleyraptorcenter.org)

Caring for Nature's  
Orphaned and Injured Wildlife



Please consider making a donation to Eagle Valley Raptor Center this month. We could really use the help! Though we've released Trapper John, we still have two injured bald eagles eating up both our food supply and our veterinary budget! Both of these birds still have a ways to go before we can consider them for possible release, and we're going to need all the help we can get.

Remember, your donation to Eagle Valley is tax deductible, as we are a non-profit organization. Your gift can do miracles: it can help grounded eagles soar once again.



Name

Address

Phone

Email address

Yes! I'd like to help!

- Add me to your mailing list
- I'd like to volunteer or help with special projects.
- I am interested in Board of Directors/Committee membership
- I'd like to schedule a school/church program or tour of Eagle Valley's facilities
- Enclosed is my donation to help provide food and vet care for the injured eagles: \$ \_\_\_\_\_