



2021 Annual Report

Dear Friends,

Has it really been four years since Urban Raptor Conservancy embarked on this odyssey? We are in awe of what we have accomplished and humbled by what potential remains to be realized. Here is a summary of our work this year.



Seattle Cooper's Hawk Project

Ed Deal and Martin Muller completed their tenth year leading the project. The Seattle Cooper's hawk population continues to expand. Despite the unprecedented heat wave in June, at the worst possible time (early nestlings), the Coops again posted record numbers in nest-building pairs (69), successful pairs (52), fledglings (192), band sightings (162), and birds banded (75). Unfortunately, they also set a record for nest failures (17).

Ed Deal published the first extensive review of Cooper's hawks in our region (The Cooper's Hawk: history and current status in Washington. *Washington Birds*, 13:81-96. <https://wos.org/documents/Publications/WA%20Birds/2021/Washington-Birds-Journal-Vol-13.pdf>).



Martin Muller banding a Cooper's hawk (Jeff Graham)

Puget Sound Peregrine Project

This project is now in its 28th year, beginning with the first urban nest in Seattle in 1994. Our city-nesting peregrines continue to suffer high mortality from window hits and drowning. The flagship downtown Seattle nest lost two of four fledglings to window collisions. Likewise, at the downtown Tacoma nest, both fledglings died from window hits. One of three fledglings from the 520 Portage Bay nest drowned; the other two did not drown only because of constant vigilance on the water by URC volunteers. The shining successes this year were the West Seattle bridge nest (another high-risk drowning site), which fledged four, and the Bradken site in Tacoma, which fledged three.

Above: Peregrine banding at 1201 3rd Ave, Seattle (Ed Deal)

Gyr Falcon in downtown Seattle, winter 2021 (Urban Raptor Conservancy, with photographer's permission)



© info@cloudfarmer.com



Downtown Tacoma peregrines, 2021. The two eyasses had just been returned to the nest box after we briefly kidnapped them to band them. Harriett is one fierce peregrine mother. (Fergus Hyke)

Rodenticides in Raptors Study

In a joint study with PAWS Wildlife Center, we have now tested 125 dead raptors for anticoagulant (blood-thinning) rodenticides: red-tailed hawks, Cooper's hawks, and five species of owls (barred owl, barn owl, great horned owl, Northern saw-whet owl, Western screech-owl). Most tested positive for exposure to anticoagulants.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we were able to launch Phase 2 of this study:

- ◆ In addition to testing for anticoagulants, we will test for one alternative to

anticoagulants, the neurotoxin bromethalin.

- ◆ We are testing three new species: bald eagles (requiring a special federal permit), peregrine falcons, and merlins. Falcons are considered bird eaters, but recent evidence has identified rodenticides in these species as well.

Seattle Merlin Project

With several dedicated volunteers, Kim McCormick and Ben Vang-Johnson of the Seattle Merlin Project documented merlin breeding at a record 32 sites in the greater Seattle area. The highlight of the summer was the successful release of an orphaned juvenile female merlin at a foster nest site. When both the youngster and her foster siblings were just starting to fly, SMP, in collaboration with PAWS Wildlife Center, released the orphan and monitored her progress— including feedings by the resident adults — until she dispersed from the nest site.

We were sad to say goodbye to Ben, who recently moved back to Minnesota. Ben was the sole bander for the project. With Kim and Ben's blessing, URC will support SMP by banding merlins, and Ed has added merlin VID banding to his federal permit. Kim will continue to manage nest searches and field observations, with Ben contributing to data analysis and mapping.

A fine review of the Seattle Merlin Project is Kim and Ben's chapter, "Seattle's Urban Merlins", in Bruce Haak's newly published book, *Magical Merlins*.



Merlin fledgling S/V (center, blue band) with her adopted siblings two days after her release in July 2021 (Kim McCormick)

Banding Programs

Under Ed's master banding permit, URC banders can put color-VID (visual identification) bands on three raptor species: Cooper's hawks, peregrine falcons, and bald eagles (eagles in rehab only). Band returns (re-sightings of banded raptors) provide data on dispersal, site fidelity, infidelity, and longevity. This year we put VID bands on 75 Cooper's hawks (a record), nine peregrines, and at PAWS, 17 bald eagles.

We band all rehabilitated raptors at PAWS.

Besides the species that receive VID bands, all rehabbed raptors are fitted with federal bands. Together Patti Loesche and Jeff Brown, PAWS Wildlife Naturalist, banded 97 raptors: bald eagles, red-tailed hawks, Cooper's hawks, ospreys, Western screech-owls, barn owls, Northern pygmy owls, saw-whet owls, great horned owls, and barred owls by the truckload. Thanks to the rich experience offered by the "PAWS Banding Academy", Jeff recently received his federal apprentice banding permit under Ed's master banding permit.



Merlin fledgling S/V in rehab at PAWS, July 2021 (Kim McCormick)

Band Returns

We just received our 500th report of a banded Cooper's hawk. Of a number of notable Cooper's hawk band returns this year, two stand out: B-3 ("Nevada girl") and D-4, both first-year, orange-banded females. B-3 was banded on 18 July in Miller Park, one of five kids at our most urban, human-tolerant site. She somehow crossed the Cascades into desolate basin and range country to within 200 miles of Las Vegas, where she was filmed and, sadly, later found dead. In happier news, her sister H-A was photographed at Woodland Park Zoo in August.



Miller Park Cooper's hawk H-A photographed at Woodland Park Zoo in August 2021 (Tiffani Rivera)

The second notable band return was Ms. D-4, one of the many premature nestling jumpers in the June heat wave (*URC Update: Summer 2021*) who were lucky enough to stay at PAWS until they became passable fliers. To ensure each bird's successful release, volunteers (thank you!) fanned out over the region to find its nest site and ensure that parents were still present to feed the youngster. D-4 was one of two Coops whose parents couldn't be found. We experimentally fostered her into a Seattle nest with only two fledglings. Our Christmas present was a report that she is alive and well, working a backyard bird feeder in Greenwood.

Volunteer Profile: Mike MacDonald



Mike MacDonald of WSDOT, peregrine protector (*Ed Deal*)

Since 2000, Mike MacDonald has been the key person to facilitate access for banders to peregrine nests on Puget Sound bridges. His professional role as a biologist is as liaison between the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the National Marine Fisheries Service. In that capacity, he knows who to talk to at WSDOT and how to get it done. Mike has made many contributions to the welfare of urban raptors in the Puget Sound region. In late 2021 he helped remove the exclusion spikes in the traditional peregrine nesting area on the I-90 East Channel Bridge. These spikes excluded the birds from two successful nest sites during the construction of the Sound Transit light rail line over the East Channel Bridge, a project that is now finished. Although peregrines have continued to nest at East Channel Bridge, they have used riskier nest sites with poor fledgling success. With the spikes removed, we hope the birds will return to their historically successful nest locations.

Raptor Rescues

Each year our volunteer banders respond to a half dozen calls of raptors, usually juvenile Cooper's Hawks, trapped in warehouses, the result of the hawk chasing prey through an open loading dock door. Once inside, something in the hawk brain makes them head for the rafters and refuse to come down low enough to exit. When warehouses have skylights that open, the hawk is out within minutes. If there are no skylights, the hawk must be trapped or it will starve to death ("suicide by warehouse"). This trapping attempt often involves hours of frustration, but when it is successful, also the satisfaction of rescuing a raptor that would die without our intervention. Patti trapped and released her first warehouse Coop in August.

Rare Raptor Visitors

Snowy Owl

In case you were hibernating and missed it, a snowy owl spent last winter in Seattle. After initial wanderings around town, it settled on Queen Anne Hill and remained for over four months. With the invaluable help of Elaine Chuang, Martin collected 29 pellets that the owl cast onto rooftops and beneath roost trees. Rodent bones were abundant in the pellets. We sent a few of these for toxicology testing and—surprise—found evidence of anticoagulant rodenticides. We will report the results in 2022.



Snowy owl in West Seattle, 2021 (Larry Gilpin)

Urban Gyrfalcon

An unprecedented visitor, a one-year-old gyrfalcon, took up winter residence in downtown Seattle. First spotted by its anonymous finder on Christmas Eve 2020, it was thought to be a juvenile peregrine until Urban Raptor Conservancy was eventually contacted and confirmed its identity. The gyrfalcon was seen regularly until 28 May 2021, hunting pigeons among the high-rise condos and engaging in aerial territorial squabbles with the downtown peregrines and other raptors. Over its five-month residence, the gyr noticeably improved both its urban hunting skills and its confidence in raptor challenges. As best as we can determine, this is the first record of an overwintering urban gyrfalcon in the lower 48 states.

Window Hits

Sadly, we have seen instances of a raptor chasing a bird into a window, resulting in the deaths of both predator and prey. This pigeon and juvenile Coop photographed as they were found this past summer on a downtown Seattle rooftop. More on this in a future newsletter.

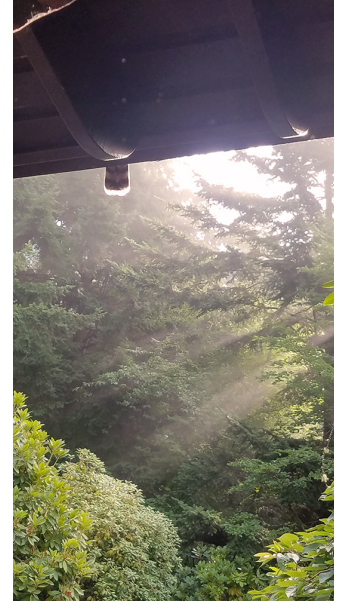


Patti Loesche

Looking Ahead

In 2022, we will do it all over again. We will continue:

- ◆ Long-term raptor population studies. Field seasons officially start in March (Cooper's hawk, peregrines, merlins), but we are already seeing signs of courtship.
- ◆ Banding programs in the field and at PAWS.
- ◆ Rodenticides in Raptors study: analyze and publish the results from phase 1, complete testing of phase 2, and report on the rodenticide analysis of snowy owl pellets.
- ◆ Broaden and train our base of dedicated volunteers.



Coop tail (Kari Medina)

We at Urban Raptor Conservancy are committed to protecting raptors and documenting our work. Just as importantly, we share our passion for raptors in our dynamic urban environment, and we welcome stewards and observers throughout the region, including our many encounters with you in the field.

Our deepest gratitude to our two 2021 grant supporters, Patagonia and the Peter Mason Family Charitable Trust, as well as the over 100 individual donations that help sustain us. Thanks to all of you—donors, dedicated volunteers, and keen-eyed observers—for your shared faith and contributions to our mission. You make our tiny organization larger by supporting our efforts and adding to our collective knowledge of our region's urban raptors. Your contributions of all kinds sustain us.

Ed Deal

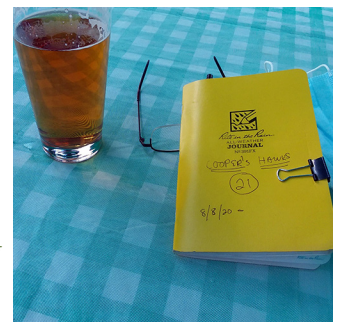
Patti Loesche

Martin Muller

Urban Raptor Conservancy

urbanraptorconservancy.org/

info@urbanraptorconservancy.org



Support URC

We gratefully accept gifts from individuals and organizations to help cover our costs. Your contributions support our Rodenticides in Raptors Project, banding expenses, and long-term monitoring studies. You also support our efforts to publicize ways to better understand and protect urban raptors in Seattle and the Puget Sound area. Urban Raptor Conservancy is registered with Amazon Smile, through which Amazon donates 0.5% of the purchase price from eligible purchases. We accept donations by check (9251 39th Ave. S., Seattle, WA 98118) or online at <https://urbanraptorconservancy.org/support-urc/> via credit card or PayPal.

