



The article ***Falcon First Aid: Atascadero Man gives Birds of Prey a Second Chance*** was written by Jan Sprague and published in the **North County Telegram-Tribune**, Thursday, April 2, 1987, Vol. 1 No. 25, page 1

ATASCADERO -- When injured birds of prey need a helping hand, they get it from a young Atascadero horse-shoer with a falconer's license.

Brad Felger said he's gained a reputation for taking in hurt and injured birds, particularly hawks and falcons, because of his experience as a falconer.

"There aren't too many licensed falconers in the area," said Felger. In fact, he may be the only one,

"Loving birds and falconry (the art of hunting with falcons) go hand-in-hand," Felger said. The experience required to be a falconer teaches you how to handle and care for birds-of-prey. "Most people who find hurt birds in the wild have no idea how to care for them."

In fact, Felger said he often gets malnourished or starved birds that have been raised in captivity. "People capture them, or take them from nests, and try to turn them into pets."

Those who really care about wild birds and happen to find one that's hurt, should take it to someone who's licensed and qualified to handle birds, said Felger.

Better yet, people should call the local office of the state department of Fish and Game. They keep a list of qualified people like Felger who have rehabilitation permits and the expertise to care for birds of prey.

On one occasion, a Fish and Game warden brought Felger an owl that had been raised illegally in captivity. "The bird had rickets - a calcium deficiency -- and would never fly again because it had been fed an improper diet."

Many of the injured birds brought to him are local hawks and falcons that injure themselves running into things. "Sometimes it's because of a run-in with man. Either they've been shot or are suffering from pesticidal poisoning," said Felger.

Natural causes also take their toll, Felger said. "During the first year of life, young birds are more susceptible to problems."

Felger said he's been a lover of birds of prey since he got his first falconer's license when he was 16 years old. It's illegal to keep a bird of prey without a license, and even with a license, some birds are still off-limits.

“Endangered birds, like the -white-tailed kite, red-shouldered hawk, osprey, vultures and golden eagles are not allowed to be kept in captivity except under the rehabilitation permit,” said Felger.

Requirements for a falconer’s license are stiff. You have to pass a written exam, serve a two-year apprenticeship under a qualified falconer, and you need a co-signer. Once issued a license, you have to write an annual report to the Department of Fish and Game reporting what birds you have or have had in your collection.

“When I got my falconer’s license, people began bringing me hurt birds,” said Felger. So began a long career of caring for the birds that brings him so much enjoyment.

Rehabilitating birds-of-prey has been tremendously rewarding, said Felger. He is currently caring for two birds - a red-tailed hawk with a shattered wing, and a sharp-shinned hawk suffering from a disease caused by eating infected prey.

The red-tailed hawk was brought to him by a local resident who found it near Cuesta College. Its wing had been badly damaged, the bone broken in several places. When injuries are that extensive, Felger takes his patients to see Dr. Jim Aarons, a Paso Robles veterinarian.

Aarons placed a pin in the bird’s wing, and cut away much of the dead and infected tissue. The operation took two hours. Felger said he will care for the hawk until fall, when molting will replace many of the feathers the bird lost in his accident.

“This bird probably flew barbed wire fence,” said Felger. “Hawks often get so absorbed in chasing prey that they don’t look where they’re going.

Fees to pay for medical bills come from local clubs, like the Central Coast Wildlife Rehabilitation Group, and private sources.

Once the hawk’s wing is mended, Felger said he’ll begin an exercise program for the bird until it is strong enough to fly once again.

Then the bird will be released back into the wild. “That’s the part that’s so satisfying about doing this,” said Felger.

“You feel like you’ve given beautiful birds a second chance It’s a wonderful feeling to take a hawk that was near death and turn him loose again, healthy strong.”