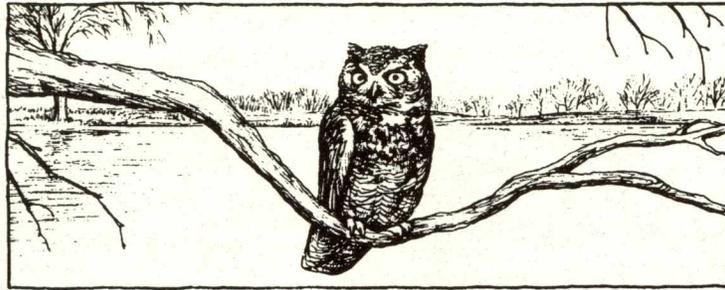


# STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



© FALL 2007

## RAPTORS REDUX

-- Mark Spreyer

Twenty years ago, I lived at Stillman while running Chicago's peregrine falcon release project. My old home phone is now Stillman's office phone: (847) 428-OWLS.

Ten years ago, after returning from Minnesota where I worked on a 5,000 square-foot raptor exhibit for the Science Museum, the owl design at the top of the newsletter was introduced. During all these years, I've been bringing owls to classrooms, nature centers, and wildlife conferences.

Now in a new century and after this summer's major building effort, I think it is safe to think of Stillman as both a nature and a raptor center.

### Raptor Assisted Living

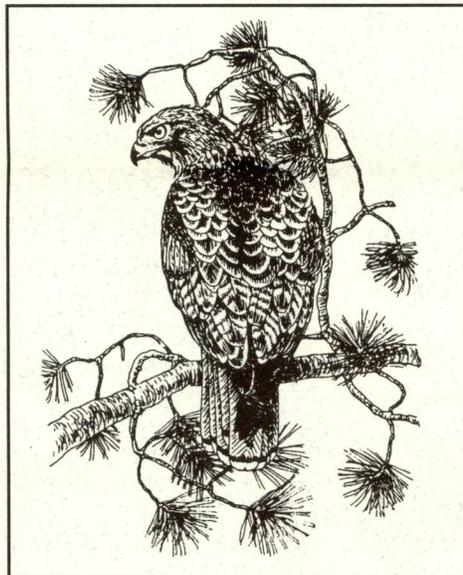
Last year, we built a 20' X 20' mews, or raptor enclosure, that houses a peregrine falcon, screech owl, and broad-winged hawk all of which are, unfortunately, permanently injured (i.e. shot in a wing or blind in one eye).

The public response to our new bird display has been very positive. This inspired board members and ace fundraisers, **Bill and Rita Mueller**, to dedicate themselves to raising funds for a second mews. Their efforts, with the help of fellow board members, were a smashing success. A special thanks, also, to **Jon Apmann** whose generous and timely donation allowed us to bring electricity to the new mews.

So this summer, we were able to build a larger mews (see photos inside) that can accommodate up to 5 birds of prey. This building will allow us to grow in the future. By the time you read this, this new building should be home to great horned owl, barn owl and turkey vulture.

Of course, this would have been impossible without the help of head builder **Kurt Wilkinson, Raymond Nowikowski**, and summer interns **Jessica Kopala, Kim Schmidt** and **Helen Reinold** (see article inside).

From hereon in, we'll let the pictures on the inside page tell the mews construction story.



## RAPTORS OUTSIDE OF THE MEWS

### Buteos Begin

Before we started building raptor housing, two species of hawks started housing projects of their own. First, was a pair of red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*).

As the scientific name indicates, Red-tails belong to the group of hawks known as buteos. Buteos can be told by their fan-shaped tail and broad, rounded wings. (Our resident broad-winged hawk is *Buteo platypterus*.) The red-tails nested atop a pine in the extreme northeast corner of our property.

Red-tails are a very adaptable species that can be found in a variety of environs. In general, they hunt rabbits and mice in open habitats.

We had been seeing and hearing the hawks for weeks until, while hauling brush, hawk-eyed Rita Mueller spotted the nest. In fact, you had to be standing in just the right spot, on a calm day, in order to get a clear view through the pine boughs.

Weeks went by, the female hunkered down on the eggs, but eventually she gave up. Perhaps the eggs were infertile, perhaps a raccoon got them, such are the ways of nature.

# STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

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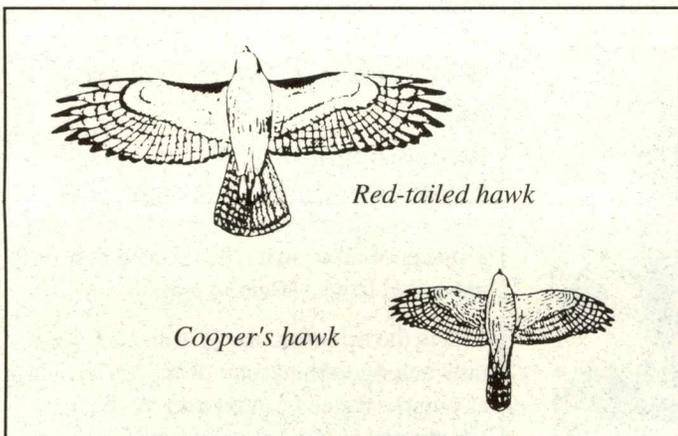
## Accipiters Accomplish

In the meantime, Cooper's Hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*) were being seen and heard in the vicinity of the main dock. Compared to buteos, accipiters, such as the Cooper's, can be told by their short rounded wings and long, rudder-like tail (see illustration).

Why the different body design for the accipiter? Cooper's hawks live in woodlands and roughly 70% of their diet are other birds. Short wings and a long tail facilitate adept aerial maneuvers required by their preferred prey and habitat.

Because we had our binoculars trained on the red-tailed nest and we assumed the building of the mews would scare off any nesting activity in the immediate area, the Cooper's nest was not discovered until the three nestlings were just about ready to leave. (I'd tell you who first spotted it but it would just go to her head!)

That's right, the Cooper's nest, placed high in a mulberry tree, was located a scant 75 feet from the raptor enclosure. To me, it seemed as if these wild birds of prey had given our new building the "good nestkeeping" seal of approval.



## Cooper's Crooners

Since I live about three trees down from the raptor mulberry, I've enjoyed listening to the variety of calls made by these birds.

This summer we've heard the female's *whaaa* given when plucking dinner delivered by the male or while flying to the nestlings with food. Then, there is the ever popular and best known *cak-cak-cak* or alarm call given when the parents feel the nest is threatened.

As I type this, I'm hearing the *eeeeeee-oo* or *speeeeeeeo* given when the young have fledged and are apparently food-begging. Typically, raptors learn to fly weeks before they learn to hunt so food begging continues outside of the nest.

Visitors on an August afternoon got to watch as the young Cooper's hawks practiced their hunting skills on juvenile green herons. The herons were more annoyed than harmed. Typically, Cooper's hunt smaller prey such as robins, jays, starlings and chipmunks.

## A Bird in the Talons is Worth Two...

Watching the young hawks practice their hunting maneuvers reminds me of a fable told by Hesiod, an ancient Greek poet.

A hawk catches a nightingale and prepares to eat her. The nightingale argues that she is too small to satisfy the mighty hawk and she begs him to let her go. The hawk responds that a small bird who calms a little hunger is better than a big bird not yet caught.

Young Cooper's take note.

## PROGRAMS

**Program Basics:** PLEASE CALL OR FAX US AT 428-OWLS(6957), OR EMAIL STILLMAN AT: stillnc@wildblue.net TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs. Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending.

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the activity) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

## BIRD BANDING OPEN HOUSES

Watch Mark Spreyer (a licensed bird bander) measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Catching birds is not always predictable, so come prepared to hike the trails. If it's raining, the activity will be cancelled.

Date: Sundays, Sept. 2 & Oct. 7

Time: 9:00AM to Noon

Fee: None

## SUNDAY MORNING BIRD WALK

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does.

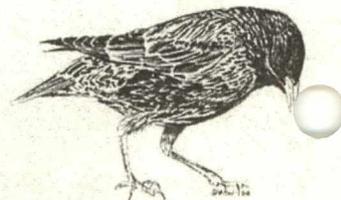
If it's raining, the activity will be cancelled.

Date: Sundays, Sept. 9 & Sept. 30

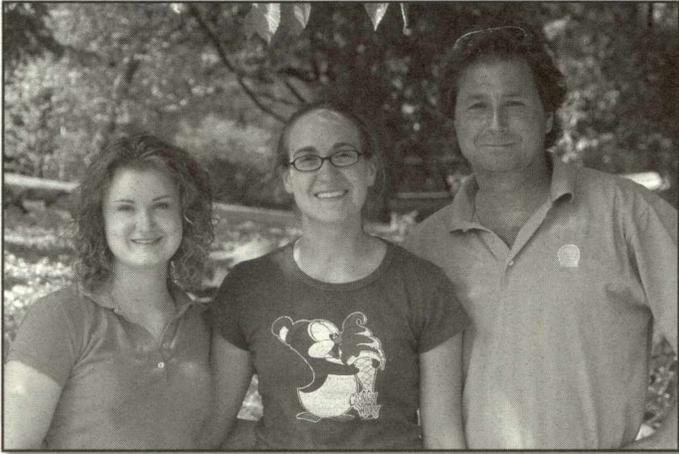
Time: 8:00AM

Fee: None

Age: 10 years and up



## Stillman Summer Album



*Prairie Woods Audubon interns Jessica Kopala and Kim Schmidt with Dan Dinelli, falconer and former Stillman board member*



*Helen Reinhold stacking buckthorn. An irresistible force meets an ever-growing object!*



*Cooper's hawk nestlings.*



*A week later, one of the youngsters keeps his eyes on us poor ground creatures.*

### WINTER HOURS BEGIN IN NOVEMBER

In September and October, Stillman will be open Sundays from 9 AM to 4 PM. Starting in November, Stillman will be open Sundays from 11 AM to 4 PM.

Please note that the Stillman Nature Center is also available, by reservation, during the week to school classes. For more information just call or email us at [stillnc@wildblue.net](mailto:stillnc@wildblue.net).

### COMING IN 2008... NEW YEAR'S DAY WALK

Join us for the annual New Year's Day walk along Stillman's trails. Over the years, we've seen everything from bluebirds and shrikes to the remains of multiple coyote kills. If you like winter, don't like football, or need to sober up; this is the walk for you.

Date: Tuesday, Jan. 1  
Time: 10:00AM  
Age: 10 years and up

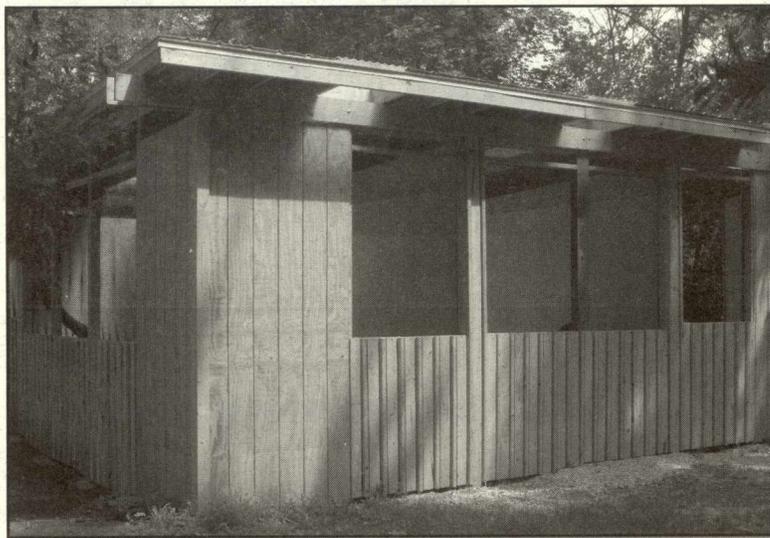
## Stillman Summer Album



*The skeleton of the new 24' x 28' raptor enclosure.*



*Kurt and Ray raising the roof!*



As you look at this south side of the mews, the great horned owl is on the right and the barn owl is in the middle. If all goes according to plan, the turkey vulture should go on the left. Note the translucent panels in the roof to allow in sunlight. Since this picture was taken, a split rail fence was erected to encourage visitors to keep a respectful distance. Also, rope-wrapped perches and large branches have been added for the birds. Remember, state and federal permits are required to keep permanently injured birds of prey for educational purposes.



*Roger Laegeler, as always, lends a hand.*

## FALL WORK DAY

Maintaining our trails and planting is a never-ending task which was made worse by the severe weather in August.

So, we need your help. Please wear gloves and shoes that you don't mind getting dirty. If you have a favorite shovel or pair of lopers, bring them along. If not, we have them. Other possible jobs include seed collecting and burning a brush pile.

Please call (847) 428-OWLS to let us know if you can volunteer your time.

### DON'T MISS RAPTOR SUNDAY!

Now's your chance to tour our new raptor enclosure. Also, you'll get to meet the great horned and screech owls plus a peregrine falcon and broad-winged hawk. We will bring the birds out so you can see them up close. Bring a camera and a friend! Drop by anytime between 1:00 and 3:00 in the afternoon.

Date: Sunday, Oct. 14

Time: 1:00 - 3:00 PM

Fee: None

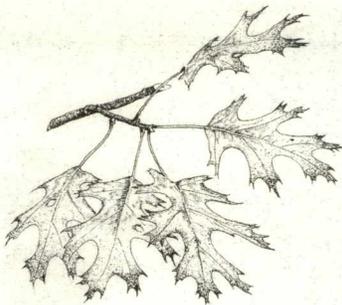
## TREE I.D. OR THIS BUD'S FOR YOU!

As the leaves turn color, join Stillman's naturalist as he shows you how to identify some of our Midwestern trees. Easy to remember tips and simple hand-outs will inspire you to open your own "branch office." Come prepared to be out in the weather.

Date: Sunday, Oct. 21

Time: 2:00PM

Fee: None



### SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS EVENT

We are hosting our 10th annual outdoor meeting. This year we are celebrating **David Johnson**, former owner of the **Wild Bird Store** in Fox River Grove and long-time Stillman supporter.

On Sunday, we'll provide the main course and beverages. We'd like you to bring along a side dish. ALL of Stillman's members, friends, volunteers and their families are invited. Feel free to come any time between 2:00 and 6:00 PM but please do call (847) 428-OWLS or email to let us know if you plan to attend and what kind of dish you'll be bringing.

Date: Sunday, Sept. 30

Time: 2:00 - 6:00PM

## Star-studded Summer Interns

An entry from our board meeting minutes said it best, "Helen has been methodically working on thankless projects." Helen Reinold started in the fall as a high school volunteer. As Roger Laegeler, the buckthorn beaver, observed, "She doesn't let grass grow under her feet."

Her senior year volunteer effort led Helen to become our Stillman intern. She starts at Augustana College in September. Helen has not been alone at Stillman this summer.

Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of the **Prairie Woods Audubon Society**, we had two additional interns working at Stillman. The Prairie Woods interns earned tuition money correlated to the number of hours they put in with us.

One of these interns, Jessica Kopala, is a sophomore at Eastern Michigan University who graduated from Rolling Meadows High School. She put in 200+ hours of service. Kim Schmidt, who was here for less time, is finishing up at Eckerd College in Florida.

Intern duties were anything but glamorous. In mid-May, for example, interns joined volunteers to dig woodland plants such as blue cohosh and baneberry from a N. Barrington construction site and transplanting them to Stillman.

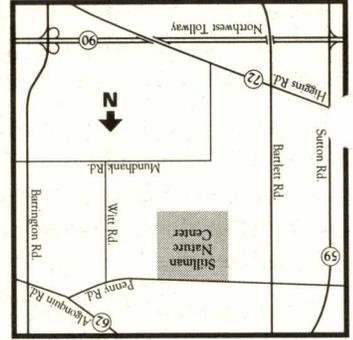
Other thankless projects included hauling gravel, cleaning cages, clearing trails, digging a ditch, organizing garages, and, believe it or not, helping me teach a class or two! As I type this, poor Helen is cleaning out two of the garages flooded by the rains of mid-August.

In an attempt to find an analogy to describe these interns, I had to look to the heavens. Kim, who was here mostly in August, a meteorite in the Perseid meteor shower. Jessica becomes Cygnus, a summer constellation. While Helen has been the moon, rotating around Stillman for the year.

When I last talked with Jessica, she wanted me to make sure to thank all the members of Prairie Woods Audubon for making the internship possible. The folks at Stillman are also tipping their hats to Prairie Woods.

On a personal note, few things make me more hopeful about the future than getting to know students like Helen, Kim and Jessica; they brighten the night sky.

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- Yes, I'd like to become or continue as a member of the Stillman Nature Center.  
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