

BORN TO BE WILD

RESCUING, REHABILITATING & RELEASING RAPTORS

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PHOTOS BY PETER GREEN
& JEN WALLACE

Red-Tailed Hawk

Peter Green / providencerraptors.com

Born to be Wild Nature Center gives raptors a second chance and another opportunity to take to the skies and live life as free as a bird.

Rhode Island's only wildlife rehabilitation center dedicated exclusively to birds of prey, Born to be Wild provides quality care to injured, sick and orphaned hawks, owls, falcons, vultures and other species with the primary goal of returning them to their natural habitats. The center is also a sanctuary for permanently disabled raptors who are unable to return to the wild. The injured birds are given a home and some are featured in the organization's popular educational programs which have reached thousands over the years.

Since Born to be Wild opened in 1998, the devoted duo of Vivian and John Maxson has rescued, rehabilitated and released hundreds of birds.

Whether hit by a car or shot by a careless or callous hunter, they need help to survive.

"Releasing these animals back into the wild is what we strive for," Vivian said.

"It is incredibly satisfying to watch a bird take flight and return to its natural habitat."



Release of a Snowy Owl

Peter Green / providencerraptors.com

"It's the best part of the job," John added. "It's a second chance."

From American Kestrels, the smallest and most colorful falcons, to Great Horned Owls, some of the largest owls in North America, the Maxsons have cared for many species of birds of prey.

The Eastern Screech Owl, for example, is a small but feisty bird with beautiful, camouflaged plumage. At one point last spring, the Maxsons were raising 16 Screech Owlets who had fallen from their nests, a demanding yet rewarding job.

Red-Tailed Hawks, Rhode Island's largest resident hawks, are also common sights at Born to be Wild. One in particular, Phoenix, holds a special place in the Maxsons' hearts. Phoenix's tail and wings were badly burned by a methane flare at the Central Landfill in Johnston. To the



John & Vivian Maxson



American Kestrel



Snowy Owl

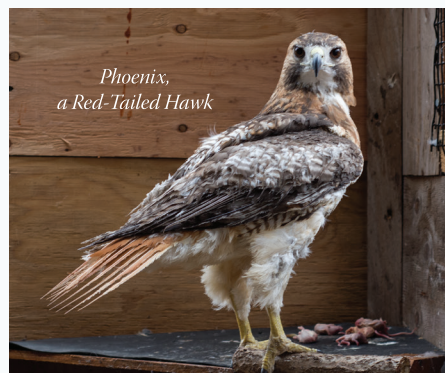
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credit of both Born to be Wild and the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation, changes are being made to make the facility safer for birds.

“Phoenix’s story has gotten a lot of attention and raised the public’s awareness of the many threats facing these animals,” Vivian said. “He will be with us until he molts and has new wing and tail feathers. Until his release, which should be later this summer, this is his safe haven.”

The Maxsons’ treatment of Phoenix is an inspiring example of their love for these majestic creatures. In the wild, with missing feathers and little insulation, Phoenix likely would have died soon after suffering his injuries.

But when temperatures dipped well below freezing earlier this year, the Maxsons brought him inside to keep him warm. They placed a heated perch in his mews and kept him safe through the harsh New England winter. Now, like many birds that enter Born to be Wild, a return to his natural habitat is well within sight.



Phoenix, a Red-Tailed Hawk

Though the Maxsons have years of experience, they are always encountering something new that truly excites them. Last year, they rescued three Peregrine Falcons, the world’s fastest animals, a rarity for them. This year, three Snowy Owls made their species’ first appearance at Born to be Wild.

“It’s always a learning curve,” John said.

“Even 16 years in – Snowy Owls!” Vivian added. “One year ago, I didn’t know much about this species. Now, I just gave a presentation on them.”

Rhode Island, like many locations south of the Arctic, saw an

exponential rise in the frequency of Snowy Owl sightings. Scientists attribute this population boom to an increase in the population of lemmings, the owls' favorite prey, in the Arctic. The cause of the lemmings' unusual prevalence could be tied to global warming, according to Vivian.

As proven by this year's Snowy Owl surprise, Born to be Wild is full of unexpected wonders. Guests leave with a better understanding of and appreciation for raptors and the natural world.

Visits to Born to be Wild, featuring private guided tours, are available by appointment only. Donations, which go directly to the care of the birds, are encouraged. Off-site environmental education programs for both small and large audiences are also available.

"We are always building, always working to become more accessible to the public and improve as a home for these birds," John said.

Born to be Wild is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. It receives no funding from state or federal agencies, but it is licensed by the R.I. Department of Environmental Management and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The organization is a member of the International Wildlife Rehab Council, the North American Falconry Association, the Wildlife Rehabilitators Association of R.I. and the Westerly Land Trust, as well.

If you find an injured wild raptor, contact Born to be Wild at 401-377-8489. If you find any other injured wild bird or animal, contact the Wildlife Rehabilitators Association of Rhode Island at 401-294-6363.

"From rescue to rehab to release, the public is the most important link," Vivian said. "Without the people who take time out of their days to help wild animals, and without the support of the public, successful rehabilitations and releases would not be possible."



Eastern Screech Owl

Born to be Wild Nature Center is located at 45 Vars Lane in Bradford. For more information, call, visit HawkRI.com or find the organization on Facebook. To view incredible photographs taken by Peter Green, who works closely with Born to be Wild, visit ProvidenceRaptors.com.



Release of a Red-Tailed Hawk