

Fugitive Hides Out at SCC

By: Xanthe Skjelfjord

Saturday, January 20, dusk. It was just starting to get dark. Professor Roy Barnes was walking back to his office from the greenhouse when he saw a bird in front of CM467 apparently eating another bird. It was very white in color and, from what Mr. Barnes could discern in the dim light, it appeared to be a bird of prey. Mr. Barnes walked quickly back to his office to grab a small digital camera. It was getting pretty dark at this point, and the camera flash would not work from so far away. Therefore he snuck up on the bird, moving quietly from bush to bush. From a distance of ten feet he was able to shoot some pretty good photos.

He was then joined by Dr. John Nagy, whom he had met just minutes ago in the Life Sciences hallway and had invited to come out to admire the bird. Dr. Nagy heard a metallic noise and asked: "What is that sound? Is it the

rain?" (it was drizzling that evening). Mr. Barnes replied: "it sounds like bells ringing, coming from the direction of the birds' feet." Simultaneously, they saw the bells around its legs. It was obviously used to humans and allowed the professors to approach very close. Indeed, it must have been a falconer's bird that had somehow escaped, and decided to catch dinner on the SCC campus! The biology professors watched the raptor feast on a mourning dove. Dr. Nagy lay down on the ground in prone position, only three feet away from the bird, and snapped some great close-ups.

Mr. Barnes headed back to the greenhouse to fetch a cage, but alas – the bird became scared by the human's movement, and flew up onto the roof of Toad Hall - taking a piece of prey with it. Moments later it flew away into the night! Had he successfully caught the raptor, Mr. Barnes would have transported it to the Liberty Wildlife Foundation, a wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organization based in Scottsdale. He called their hotline anyway, to make them aware of a bird "on the loose".



Photos: an adult Prairie Falcon feeding on a mourning dove, photographed on SCC campus just south of the Computer-Math building. Notice the bells and jesses around the bird's legs. A "jess" is a strap to which bells and a leash can be fastened. Please note that these pictures were not zoomed in – they were actually taken this close up! To see some more photos taken by Professors Barnes and Nagy, please visit the CNUW web-site: <http://www.scottsdalecc.edu/cnuw/prairiefalcon.html>

story continued on next page...



Back in the office, examination of the photos on a larger screen revealed the bird to be a Prairie Falcon (one of the four falcon species which are native to Arizona). But it was a very white individual – perhaps a hybrid of some sort? CNUW staff did some research and got the answer: the Prairie Falcon was actually a cross with a Gyrfalcon, an exotic species (not native to Arizona), almost entirely white in color.

What is quite interesting about this story is how the fugitive chose SCC as its “hiding” refuge, lending evidence to our belief that the campus offers an attractive habitat for birds.

CNUW would like to thank the following people for their invaluable contributions to the writing of this article: Bill Burger, the Falconry Coordinator at [the Arizona Game & Fish Department](#), Jim Dawson, President of the Arizona Falconers’ Association, and Jayme Perlman of the National American Falconers’ Association. Information for this article was also obtained from [Wikipedia](#).

FALCON FUN FACTS:

- Falconry (or hawking) is an art or sport which involves raptors (birds of prey) trained to hunt or pursue game.
- Falconry dates back to about 1,000 B.C. Some believe it started as early as 2,000 B.C. in the Middle and Far East.
- A Prairie Falcon can live up to 20 years, but the average lifespan is under 3 years.
- The most common species of raptor used in Arizona for falconry is the Red-tailed Hawk. The second most common is the American Kestrel. Beginning falconers in Arizona must choose one of these two species for initial capture.
- Harris’s Hawk is the next most common species possessed by falconers in Arizona.
- A couple of falconers in Arizona use owls (Great-horned Owl and Screech Owl).
- Rarely, a Golden Eagle is used, or hybrid falcons.
- Currently, there are approx. 80 licensed falconers in the state of Arizona.
- The Arizona Game and Fish Department regulates the activity of falconry. A falconer must be licensed at both the state and federal level.
- Falconry offers the potential for education – a trained raptor can serve as ambassador to its species, and thereby inspire wildlife conservation efforts.

UPCOMING EVENT ...

EARTH DAY is April 22. Look for our next newsletter coming out on April 22.

UNSUNG HEROES ...

Special thanks to Natalie Case, our Exhibits Curator, who works tirelessly, and sometimes late into the night, caring for the creatures of Toad Hall, and preparing our facilities for the biodiversity tours.

Thank you to the dedicated volunteers of [the Liberty Wildlife Foundation](#), whose awe-inspiring presentation of birds of prey leaves lasting impressions on our 4th grade visitors.

NOTE OF THANKS TO ...

Finally, we would like to thank the Environmental Protection Agency for approving an environmental education grant for CNUW’s biodiversity education program (funding 2006-07).

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Meet Your Desert Neighbor: Feature: Anna's Hummingbird

By: Xanthe Skjelfjord



Photo: Anna's Hummingbird in her nest at Scottsdale Community College. The female builds the nest, incorporating spider webs for strength.

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) is a species named after the lovely Anna, a 19th century Duchess of Rivoli in Austria. We are privileged to enjoy Anna's Hummingbirds throughout the year on our campus, owing to the variety of red flowers blooming at different times of year. These birds love to eat nectar from the native Fairy Duster (pink flowers), the Baja Fairy Duster (bright red flowers), Red Penstamen, Red Yucca and Chuparosa, the latter two having tubular flowers (perfectly shaped for their long beaks). Anna's hummingbirds also eat a lot of bugs for the protein. Some of the best places on campus to spot these delightful birds include the flower bed by the gazebo, the wash along the front entrance road, and the potted ficus tree in the breezeway between LS and PS buildings. The territorial males can often be seen perched above floral areas.

Attracting Anna:

- Hummingbirds love red and pink, so our resident bird expert, Jean Rigden, recommends painting your hummingbird feeder red.
- Recipe: mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar per cup of water. Do not add coloring dye to the water. As long as the bird feeder is red, the birds will come and drink!

Meet the Members of CNUW: Feature Bio: Andy Cummings

Many of you have probably seen the employees and volunteers of CNUW on campus—tilling our propagation yards, digging around in the pond by the Student Center, weeding the Peace Garden, or working in a variety of other capacities, but you may be unacquainted with each member's name, particular goals, interests, and unique reasons for being involved with our organization. In this issue of "cnews" we'd like to introduce you to Andy Cummings.



Photo: Andy out in the field – taking pictures of birds at the Riparian Preserve at the Gilbert Water Ranch, using a telescopic camera.

“I have been working for CNUW on and off since late 2003. I've taken part in many of the projects at CNUW, but one of the most memorable for me was helping collect lowland leopard frogs. Currently I'm taking a few classes at SCC but next semester I will be transferring to ASU to pursue a Bachelors degree in conservation biology. My long term academic goal is to eventually get a PhD. I am in the very early phase of a project with Dr. John Nagy that will involve modeling the predator/prey interactions between a horned lizard and harvest ant species. I am also interested in seeing how climate, primarily precipitation, will drive those cycles.”