



HUNGRY OWL PROJECT NEWSLETTER

www.hungryowl.org

"For owls and our shared environment"

Issue No. 1 - 2016

Photo by Kurt Lindsay

Caring For Orphaned Barn Owls

With 2015 HOP "Hero of the Owls" Award Recipient, Rob Jaret

*By Maggie Rufo,
HOP Founding Member*

High atop a hill, in northern Marin County, perches the home of this year's HOO (Hero of Owls) awardee. With a sweeping view of the Petaluma River, dotted with stands of twisted oak trees, our hero's property is a paradise for humans and animals. A number of years ago, the Hungry Owl Project met our hero, Rob Jaret, at a meeting of his neighborhood

went even further by offering to become a barn owl foster volunteer. Rob has been helping the Hungry Owl Project since 2008!

openings between bales), some have had their nest tree cut down, while others have fallen from nests to which we are unable to return them to.

...continued on Page 6

This job is not like fostering cuddly cats or dogs! In a nutshell, or rather an owl box, the volunteer agrees that he or she will keep a supply of frozen rodents at their home to feed orphaned or displaced young barn owls for a period of up to 4 months. The young owls have to be at the stage where they can feed themselves and keep themselves warm, which occurs at about 3 weeks of age. The owls are placed in a barn owl nesting box on the volunteer's property. A ladder is set up next to the box. Each day the volunteer must take out about 5-6 adult mice, per owlet, and defrost them. During the day the volunteer climbs the ladder and carefully drops the food into the box. The volunteer must not interact, talk to, or pet the owls. The person is essentially mimicking the natural behavior of parent barn owls who, once their chicks are old enough, spend all their time hunting at night and dropping food into the nest, often surrounding their chicks with a large cache of food!



"Little Dude" - one of the Barn Owlets, fostered by Rob



Maggie Rufo, Alex Godbe and 2015 Hero of the Owls (HOO) Awardee, Rob Jaret

association. We were invited to come and talk to the residents about attracting owls with barn owl nesting boxes. The residents went on to make some boxes and place them around the neighborhood. But Rob

The barn owlets arrive into our care for a variety of reasons. Some have come in on hay bale deliveries from far away (barn owls nest in stacked hay bales, in the

*Left photo by Benjielou Reyes
Right photo by Rob Jaret*





My Holiday Wish

This holiday season, I can't deny that, I want suffering to end, have tree-huggers rule the world and most of all have "whorled peas", but I'd settle for a complete ban on the use of all rodent poison. Strides have been made to limit its use, but the stuff remains on the shelves and the poison continues up the food chain.

It is easy to get lost in the nuts and bolts of managing HOP and loose sight of why we do what we do. I often pause to remind myself, that HOP exists to be a vital voice for positive change. HOP is part of the solution to rodent poison by encouraging Barn Owls as part of an IPM approach to non toxic rodent control. Currently, we manage 160 boxes, spread across the Greater Bay Area and Sonoma/Napa Wine Country. To date, over 1,400 HOP Barn Owl Boxes have been installed. Each box can supply safe nesting for one Barn Owl family and each family can consume as many as 3,000 rodents in a single nesting season. Education is very much key to raising awareness with this issue. We educate and provide solutions to arborists, pest control companies, vineyard managers, home owners associations, landscapers and ranchers. This year, 31 people volunteered with HOP, over 1,400 people attended our educational presentations and countless others were engaged through our resource-filled website, newsletters and social media channels. Our message is simply one of promoting stewardship, compassion for wildlife and understanding that we are all dependent on the delicate balance of nature.

Einstein said "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." I am grateful not to have lost my ability to see miracles around me. After all these years, I still get chills seeing a Barn Owl float above me beneath the black of the night sky. It is that excitement for the wild things that keeps me doing what I do. I do believe that we all can make a difference in conservation, however we will all leave footprints. It will depend on us how deep that footprint will be. Let us tread lightly on this blue planet we call home and always see the miracles that constantly surround us.

From all of us at HOP, please have a wonderful holiday season.

Sincerely,

Alex Godbe, Executive Director

Ambassador Owl Update

Buho the Western Screech Owl



2015 was Buho's first full year with the Hungry Owl Project, and it couldn't have gone better. He spent the year thrilling audiences of all ages in our educational outreach programs. If you haven't had a chance to meet him, we hope you get to soon!

Photo by Kemmeo Parr

Gazeau the Great Horned Owl



Gazeau has been making good strides in her training this year. She's progressed to being on the glove in front of small crowds. We hope to be able to introduce you to her soon!

Photo by Linda Knight



HOP Newsletter - Issue No. 1, 2016

The Hungry Owl Project Newsletter is published semi-quarterly. Subscribe by becoming a HOP member at www.hungryowl.org or by calling 415-454-4587.

We make every effort to ensure that all contents of this publication are accurate. Nonetheless, human error, printing errors and other mistakes still occasionally occur.

Printed locally in the SF Bay Area on recycled paper.

The Hungry Owl Project

50 Glen Rd, Novato, CA 94945
415-454-4587
info@hungryowl.org

www.hungryowl.org

Executive Director: Alex Godbe
Editor / Assistant Director: Joe Fox

© 2016 Hungry Owl Project

Adopt an Owl

& Support the Hungry Owl Project



Northern Spotted Owl Chick

Help protect an owl species of your choice! Select a species of owl to adopt and not only does the recipient get a gift package, but also the knowledge they are helping owls. Every symbolic owl adoption package helps protect owls by funding the Hungry Owl Project's many efforts in owl conservation and stewardship. You can also "gift" an adoption to a loved one!

Adoption Gifts

- *Personalized Adoption Certificate*
- *High Quality Prints of Owls by Watercolor Artist Mary Blake*
- *Boxes of Barn Owl Greeting Cards by Artist Jeannine Chappell*
- *And more!*

Adopt Online at:
www.hungryowl.org



Barn Owl



Great Horned Owl



Northern Spotted Owl

How Can You Help?

Do you love Owls and the Hungry Owl Project and want to help? Here are some ideas how:

- *For rodent control, use safe alternatives and NEVER use rodent poisons.*
- *Volunteer with HOP or your local wildlife conservation group. Visit our website to see what's available.*
- *Attend a Hungry Owl Project educational event and then inform friends and family about the dangers of rodenticides and the non-toxic alternatives.*
- *If you have a suitable environment, install nesting boxes - provide safe nesting for owls and enjoy their potent rodent control.*
- *Make a tax deductible contribution to HOP to help us continue our work.*

www.hungryowl.org



Wild Birds Unlimited[®]
Nature Shop



The Bay Area's best source for...

- Birdfeeding supplies
- Owl and bird houses
- Wildlife binoculars
- Nature books and gifts
- Native bird expertise

Wild Birds Unlimited of Marin

104 Vintage Way, Ste. A-7
On Hwy 101 in Novato
wbu.com/marin
(415) 893-0500

Owl Optics

When we first see an owl, we see its eyes, large and alert. We may feel those beautiful eyes staring deep into our souls. But, for owls, their eyes are crucial for their survival. Often with little light, they need to spot prey that's camouflaged, hiding, or fleeing. What makes these eyes so special?

Size of an owl's eye

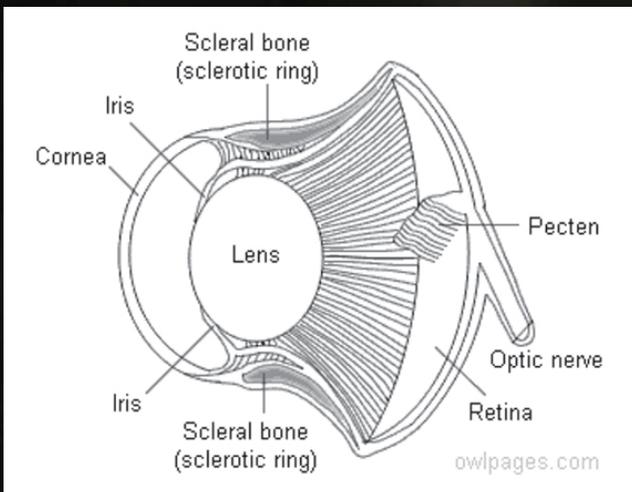
Large and forward-facing, an owl's eyes may account for *one to five percent* of its body weight, depending on species.

For the average person, that could mean lugging around eyes weighing over **SEVEN** pounds instead of the 1/32 of a pound ours actually weigh.

Shape

To bring in and process as much detail and light as possible, the owl's eye is shaped more like a tube (ours is shaped more like a ball) with a large retina to receive and process information.

An eye like this can't move. So an owl must turn its whole head to look around - which it does very well. An owl can turn its head 270 degrees from the front position!



Skulls Built For Seeing



These views of Great Horned Owl skulls show the importance of vision.

NOTE:

- The size of the eyes relative to the head
- The protective ring of bone to keep the eye safe



Binocular Vision

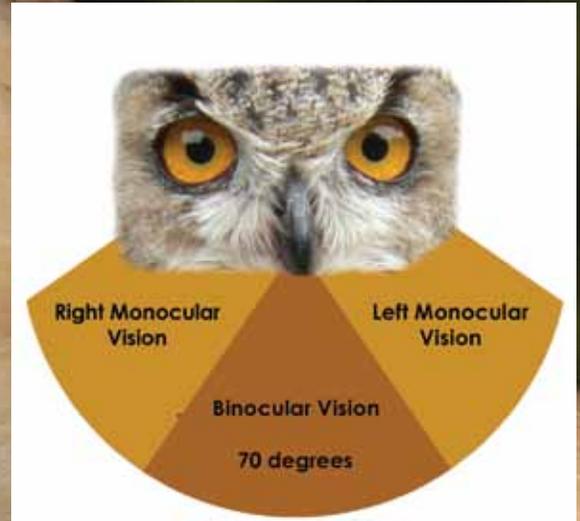
A hunter must know instantly how far away their prey is. Predators (like owls and like us) have eyes in the front of their heads. Objects in the middle of their line of sight are seen by both eyes and, by seeing an object from two sides at the same time, they can figure out distance.

Blinking

As with us, a blink can protect the eye, moisten it, and wipe away debris; it can block out light to let us sleep.

Maybe it can communicate emotion from one owl to the other.

Unlike us, owls have **THREE** eyelids. The upper lid closes **DOWN** when the owl blinks. The lower closes **UP** when the owl sleeps. The third lid, the nictitating membrane, is a thin layer that closes **DIAGONALLY** across the eye, to clean and protect its surface.



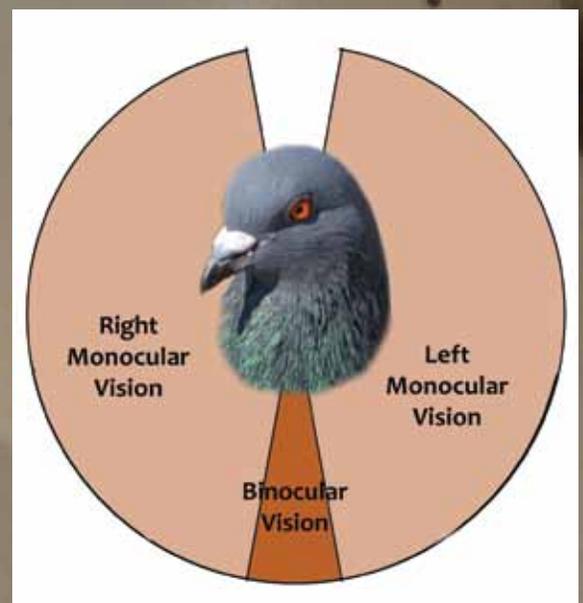
Color

Owl eye color varies by species and includes pale yellow, bright gold, and dark gray, almost black. They are often the opposite of camoflauge - an owl must close its eyes to hide.

Why do you think owls have different colored eyes?



In comparison, prey animals have eyes on the sides of their heads, so they can see all around at once. It's harder to sneak up on them, even from behind, but it's also harder for them to determine distance.



Caring For Orphaned Barn Owls Cont... *(Continued from page 1)*

Each owl has a unique story and, thanks to Rob's interest and diligence, we know each one has a unique personality. Rob knows this well because his foster owl boxes have small cameras in them. This is what we love about fostering barn owls with Rob: he provides frequent updates that include photos and video, and there are many wild barn owls around his property that can take our foster fledglings under their wings. It is so important to us to know that the owls we place are doing well and thriving and this is what makes Rob Jaret our hero and the individual chosen to receive the 2015 "HOO" Award.

This year Rob cared for two special owls. Each one came in alone, which is not ideal for them as it's important to be with their own kind. But they ended up together as foster brothers at Rob's Place, after a thorough medical check and evaluation at WildCare. During their time in his care, Rob often gives the owlets nicknames as he gets to know them (via the camera and their behavior when he drops the food in the box). So this year's pair ended up being called Woodstock and Little Dude. Surely



*Woodstock as a tiny chick.
Photo by Barbara Rich*

everyone knows Woodstock, the yellow bird with spiky hair who is Snoopy's BFF (Bird Friend Forever)! Woodstock came to us all the way from Redding, California, with quite a complicated story involving fire fighters training for the dangerous work of fighting wildfires. You can read about Woodstock's truly amazing rescue by our friends at

Wildlife Emergency Services, by following the link at the end of the article.

Little Dude, on the other hand, is a local boy, straight out of Nicaso, California. Little Dude hatched in our well-known Nicasio School Owl box that streams live via the internet. The pair who have nested there for many years are known as Salt and Pepper, and their faithful watchers have a Facebook page set up called the "Salt and Pepper Fan Club" (view their owl cams on our website). Little Dude was the youngest of this year's clutch. Thanks to the vigilance of our watchers, as well as our volunteer bird banding team, we learned that Little Dude was in need of our help. After a visit to WildCare (our local wildlife hospital) for a medical examination, it was determined he would do best in a foster situation.



Little Dude & Woodstock

Placed together at Rob's property, Little Dude and Woodstock bonded and thrived. Eventually they branched out and left their safe home to discover the wild world. Rob was able to identify Little Dude from the other owls outside because of his exceptionally white breast and the fact that he is still on-site and often visits the nest box. Once the owls

fledge, Rob continues to provide food in the box for several weeks as they learn to hunt. The other adult owls in the area most likely took on some of the care of these youngsters, but supplements are needed so as not to overburden the wild food delivery service. Little Dude and Woodstock, though separated from their natural families, could not have found a better place to grow up and learn the ways of the world. Rob's frequent updates were joyous and comforting to everyone involved in saving these barn owls.

This is quite a commitment on the part of a person who is a partner, with his brother, in a busy law firm, and also a caregiver to his parents. What would make such a busy person take on more caregiving work? For the answers we subjected Rob to a brief interrogation (hopefully much easier than what he faces in court).

Hungry Owl Project: Rob, why do you defrost mice every single day, and climb a ladder every night to feed the owls, as well as spend the time editing videos to send us?

RJ: I love fostering the barn owls because they are so smart and interactive. You would think that when you remove the cover from their box that they would fly off never to be seen again! Instead, they stay close to the box and I can see them in the trees during the day, keeping an eye on me. They will hang around for a few days, few weeks, or even a few months depending on the owl, accepting food left out for them while they hone their survival instincts. The other thing that is very interesting is that the barn owls are not competitive amongst themselves and the adults caring for their offspring in one box will visit the foster owls in another box and communicate with them.

Hungry Owl Project: Let's talk about Little Dude. Why is he so special to you?

RJ: Little Dude is my favorite of all owls. He arrived with the name "Little Dude" as he was named by students who were observing him in another box with the camera. He was also teamed up with Woodstock who was raised from a hatchling. I was told that neither one of them had a good chance of survival because Woodstock was so small, and Little Dude was not thriving. However, they both did great and Little Dude stayed around in the yard for quite a long time so it was easy to recognize him as he had the most white face and body I have seen of any of the other owls. He was very photogenic and had interesting facial expressions. Also, many months after I had not seen him he reappeared in the backyard in the same tree sitting on the same branch. He was there for about a week and then flew off again. Hopefully he is still in the neighborhood and I think he was the father of the offspring at one of the three boxes in the yard.

Hungry Owl Project: What does it feel like when you are sitting outside your home hearing and seeing the barn owls flying around?

RJ: It is surreal to see three or four or five owls flying around in the yard after they have left their boxes. They are silent and look like flying torpedoes or very large moths! You can tell the fledglings from the older adults as their flight is choppy and they land awkwardly on the trees. Their screeches are not as strong and are sometimes garbled compared to the adults who fly in smoothly and making clicking sounds. It is a wonderful experience and I wish everyone could have a chance to see them!

Rob recently lost his beloved dad, Julian Jaret, and he told me: "As you can probably imagine the owl fostering is joyful and a good release from other stressors!" I'm sure his dad was really proud of all the good works for which Rob is responsible, for animals and people too! Truly, this compassionate and caring person is a Hero of the Owls and we are delighted to choose our friend Rob Jaret for this recognition! Thanks Rob! ■

*To read Woodstock's rescue story, visit:
<http://ow.ly/V0ayQ>*

To make a tax-deductible donation in honor of Rob & the owls, you can use the supplied envelope, or visit www.hungryowl.org

We do occasionally look for additional foster caregivers and boxes. However, it is a huge responsibility and we can only accept boxes in ideal situations. If you are interested, reach out to us at: info@hungryowl.org



Little Dude - Photo by Rob Jaret

Welcome New HOP Staff

Karen Gosling



We're excited to introduce the first of our new staff members, Karen Gosling. Karen will be helping us with office administration, bookkeeping and more. She brings years of prior experience and we're happy to have her on the team. If you run into her at a future HOP event be sure to give her a warm welcome!

Sarah Sawtelle



Our second new staff member is Sarah Sawtelle. Sarah will be taking on the tall order of managing our box program. If you call us for boxes, build boxes or have boxes in our box management programs, chances are, you'll be chatting with Sarah at some point. Be sure to welcome her to the team! In the near future, you may even see her working with our education crew.

Welcome Sarah and Karen! We're excited to have you both on board.

HOP is a partnership with
wildcare

Raptor Rescue & Reunite Stories: Western Screech Owls

By Alex Godbe, HOP Executive Director and Raptor Rescue Reunite Program Lead

It is a wonderful surprise to find out that an owl family has moved into the neighborhood, but it can be a problem when they become the center of attention. This is especially so when the nest cavity is in a branch, precariously overhanging a road and immediately above a STOP sign near an intersection in a busy community.

In late spring, a concerned neighbor had called reporting seeing that two owlets had come out of a nest cavity and were only about 5' feet above the ground in a

flimsy tree by the side of the road. HOP's Raptor Rescue & Reunite (RRR) team was called to the situation and found a parent bird in the cavity and two fledgling Screech Owls surrounded by a crowd of people.

As it turns out, there had been attempts by well-meaning children to capture the young owls. Although the intention was good, untrained attempts to catch birds, can put undue stress on them. These owlets had just ventured outside of their cavity and needed all of their strength to mature enough to fly to safety (which can take only a couple of days). It is important to let wild creatures be wild and to leave them in peace. Since the owlets appeared healthy, HOP decided it would be best to simply monitor the birds and reach out to the neighborhood to ask everyone to keep a distance to allow the youngsters to do what nature had intended.

In the next couple of days of monitoring, things seemed to be alright. However, one night, an owlet did find its way into a garage - where it stayed overnight. The following morning it was successfully returned to its family. Not long after that, the whole family was gone. It is believed that the owlets had matured enough to fly and followed the parents to safety in



Photo by George Eade

a tree lined creek below.

Where they were originally found, the owlets were in danger from dogs, cats, cars and humans. The decision to leave them there was not an easy one, but it was felt that the risk was worth it to allow the young owls to remain with their parents, who would be able to give them the best chance possible to survive in the wild. ■

For information on what to do if you ever find a raptor that appears to be fallen, injured or in danger visit:

www.hungryowl.org



*A tiny Western Screech Owl in a tree cavity above a stop sign.
Photo by George Eade*