



Newsletter

Arizona Falconers Association

June 2017

A Message from the President

Charlie Kaiser

Hi everyone. The molt is in full swing. Our hawks are dropping plenty of feathers, and my first-year male Harris's is getting his new adult feathers! The change from an immature to adult bird is always a wonder to see. While we hate stopping for the season, the start of the molt, along with the presence of rattlesnakes in our hawking lands, means it's time to give it a rest for a while. There's plenty of other stuff going on during the off-season...

With great sadness, I regret to announce that Ken Mesch lost his battle with cancer last month. Ken was an amazing man and a great friend. I miss him terribly... AFA will be celebrating his life at our upcoming summer picnic. We will also be helping to underwrite a plaque in the Wall of Remembrance at the Archives of Falconry in Boise.

Speaking of the summer picnic... we are all set for another good time at Thumb Butte in Prescott on Sunday, July 23rd. Basic times are 11-3 but we will be there early. It will be potluck. AFA will provide grilled meats for everyone (and I'm NOT talking hot dogs and burgers, either!), but please bring a side dish or dessert to share. Birds are welcome; feel free to show off your new hawk! Please note, there are ***no dogs allowed*** as per picnic area rules. Also feel free to bring falconry items to sell or trade or give away, and if we get enough, maybe we'll do a raffle or auction or something...

Plans are underway for our next Desert Hawking Classic. The initial plan is to hold the meet in Chino Valley, but final determination will wait until we see what the game situation is later this year. And we are already working on an option to hold the meet next year in the Camp Verde area again! We have some motivated people working on these meets and my thanks goes out to everyone involved...

I'd also like to welcome our newest board members, Kristy McDonald and Shantell Dahlberg. Kristy is taking on the Secretary position and Shantell is

taking over the education chair position that Matt has filled for so long along with his apprentice chair work. Matt; thanks for all your hard work on this stuff over the years and welcome Shantell and Kristy!

I'd also like to thank Paul and Anne Schnell for driving the newsletter.

See you at Thumb Butte, Prescott on July 23rd!

Mark Your Calendars

Sunday July 23rd, 2017: Summer Picnic at Thumb Butte in Prescott, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. *Bring a dish to share!*

Please note: Absolutely no dogs allowed – picnic area rules!

Questions: Paul or Anne 928-636-4262

January 25th-28th 2018: Desert Hawking Classic



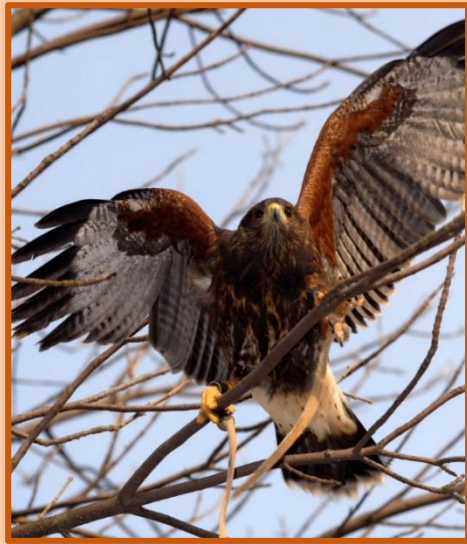
Thank you Arizona Falconers Association for your generous support of the Peregrine Fund's American Kestrel Partnership!

Paul and Anne Schnell

Photo by P. Schnell

Diet and Nutrition During the Molt

By Paul and Anne Schnell



Keeping a fit and healthy hawk for hunting is a key element in a successful apprenticeship and beyond. Learning to properly support your bird's nutritional needs during the molt will help ensure that you and your bird will have success in the fall when hunting season returns. We like to say that falconry standards are the 'gold standard' in keeping raptors in the best health and fitness that a human can provide. By virtue of their daily relationship and attachments to us, we responsibly and intelligently owe it to them!

Now – in these lazy days of summer – the birds are molting last season's feathers and, of course, growing new ones sprouting from active follicles in the pterygiae (feather tracts) on the body. In the fall and winter, calories are carefully increased to adjust for the added energy demands from cold and exercise (falconry). In about April through late summer, additional calories are again required to build those sturdy, healthy feathers that are replacing the molted ones.

So, is it a good idea to feed raptors *ad libitum* (without restraint) through the molt? With respect to food intake, aren't all organisms self-regulating? Yes. It is an environmental response in nature to the vagaries of feast and famine. Consume (or in many species, cache) all available calories right now to guard against starvation later. But serious, even deadly, health issues can arise from this feeding practice.

Univ. of MN raptor veterinarian Patrick Redig once summed it this way, "There is a perception that rate of molt is correlated with increased body weight. Accordingly, a red-tail normally flying at 1350 g. may be brought up to 1800 g. on an 'ad lib' diet, an increase of 33%. A gyrfalcon flying at 52 oz. can increase easily to 70 oz, an increase of 36% (although I know of one gyrfalcon that molts at a weight lower than his flying weight). If I increased my weight by 35%, I would go from a slightly overweight condition at 165 lbs to grossly overweight at 233 lbs. Some birds have been observed to gain so much weight that they are literally unable to fly until their weight is again reduced at the end of the molt."

In addition to flight and motion difficulty, respiratory compromise (labored breathing caused by excess fat surrounding the air sacs) and bumblefoot (soft tissue damage accruing from gross obesity) are omnipresent dangers that are

easily avoided by careful feeding and weight monitoring during molt. An obese bird that breathes heavily when exerted may give false signs of aspergillosis, when in fact its breathing is compromised by excessive fat lining its organs. Likewise, a too fat bird may develop those dreaded foot lesions and ruin the start of the hunting season. Of course, both circumstances create expensive vet costs and headaches for the falconer! More importantly, what about your distressed bird?

What to do? A 10-15% body weight increase, in our experience, is more desirable than 30%. Clearly, a 30% increase in body weight translates to 30% more pressure being applied to the bottom of the feet, and a doubling of internal fat that robs respiratory function. We also feed whole lab rodents, coturnix quail, chicken and rabbit, and once weekly add Vitahawk Maintenance or egg yolk with the crushed shells for a little extra calcium. We always separate the albumen (raw egg whites) as this inhibits absorption of biotin (an essential vitamin). Egg yolk contains carotenoids (Vitamin A and related compounds) and once weekly use tends to give a bird's cere and feet a bright, healthy yellow color.

We should also mention that feeding lab rodents containing whole organs is superior to meals where organs and intestines have been removed. Gut and stomach contents contain beneficial macronutrients and allow the raptor to selectively eat what it chooses. Further, feeding time provides behavioral enrichment for the captive that typically waits enthusiastically for its dinner to arrive. Granted, removing guts, feather and fur is a convenience for the falconer desiring a clean mews, but why deprive your hunting partner this special time in its day? However, removal of excess fat from adult lab rats is recommended.

The essential components in a raptor's diet: energy, water, minerals and vitamins collectively will determine the health and vigor in your bird or birds. Water plays a vital role in the transport of minerals and vitamins. This is well-known and appreciated by seasoned falconers many of whom soak their birds' meals before offering. While some birds love to take a bath or to soak in their bath pan, all birds get the bulk of their daily moisture from their daily meal.

The most accurate way to become intimately familiar with your new bird, particularly during its first molt and successive ones, is to record its weight each day at feeding time. Keep a log sheet in a clipboard and carefully note weights, changes in behavior or appearance and daily temperature. You will be surprised to see how your bird's progress and health is trending in relation to its diet, exercise and amount consumed. Check your scale monthly for accuracy. We calibrate our German Mikro-Doft balance using a Kg mass to keep the scale's weight to within 1-gram accuracy.