

RESCUED AMERICAN KESTRELS RELEASED IN PRESCOTT

Life can be hard for birds – especially young birds. Recently a few just-released young American Kestrels either experienced or observed events which, although alarming at the time, may improve their chances for reaching adulthood.

Early in August Kenneth “Tuk” Jacobson, Raptor Management Coordinator with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) brought six young male/female American Kestrel pairs for release at three locations in Prescott. These birds had been rescued before they were able to fly and were cared for at Liberty Wildlife Center in Phoenix. At each release site, Tuk opened one carrier box at a time and each kestrel in the pair chose when to fly out. All of the females flew out, often first, and perched in a nearby tree. Three males also perched nearby, while three flew farther and then disappeared from view. One of the males, on his first-ever free flight, soared up in a thermal before flying out of sight.

At two of the release sites, the kestrels had very little time to adjust to their new surroundings before they experienced unfamiliar and, to two of them, quite alarming events. A Red-tailed Hawk flew through a tree where one male kestrel perched within the canopy and then swooped past a second tree after the kestrel moved. The hawk then flew away. At another location, a Swainson’s Hawk dove down toward a female perched at the top of a tree, grasped her in its talons, and flew toward the crowd of observers. The kestrel escaped and flew to a more protected lower branch in a second tree and the hawk flew away. Spectators observed the kestrel’s very alert posture and her nearly constant scanning of the area. Tuk reported that she seemed to be uninjured and, a bit later, her posture had relaxed and she was bobbing her head and tail, as kestrels do.

Tuk explained that the hawk encounters may actually benefit the kestrels. All of these released young kestrels were rescued before they could learn about predators from their parents. Now several of them, both the two who were threatened and those who witnessed the threats, have been introduced, without injury, to one of the hazards of their new world. Such a lesson may make them better able to survive their very challenging first year.

We hope these young kestrels will do well in their first year and will stay in or return to the Prescott area. Perhaps some of them will use our nest boxes in the spring. Reports about observations of the released kestrels, identified by a large black band on the left leg, are welcomed at contact@prescottaudubon.org.

Many thanks to Tuk Jacobson and AGFD for coordinating and conducting the release, to Liberty Wildlife Center for caring for the birds, to Michael Byrd of Prescott Creeks and Jennifer Stroud and her colleagues at the Heritage Park Zoological Sanctuary for assisting with the release

locations, and to the City of Prescott and the private landowners for permission to release the kestrels. All photos in this article are courtesy of Cory Shaw.