

Rat Killer (continued)

Ranging in age from about four to early teens, the children sat attentively in a neat row on the floor, in front of the adults. When the presenter, Jan, asked a question, hands enthusiastically shot up, followed by well-thought-out and informed answers. When asked, "What is a raptor?" the brother-sister team nailed the answer. Sister responded confidently, "They are birds that hunt for foods that are meat." Younger brother then added that they hunt with sharp feet that are talons. He then used Rat Killer's talons to demonstrate, holding the eagle high and bringing it with a flourish to the floor, feet first.

While sharing information about the natural history of these birds, as well as their rehabilitation stories, Soarin' Hawk volunteers asked the audience to recognize the connections between the raptors' well-being and human activities such as using pesticides, littering on roadways, or using lead shot or sinkers. When the audience was asked why some farmers put up kestrel nest boxes on their properties, one young guest brightened when he made the connection, and threw his hand into the air. "Because Kestrels eat the mice and insects that can eat their crops!" he exclaimed.

Soarin' Hawk handlers Nicole and Barb brought out, in succession, Tawny, the Kestrel; Puck the Screech Owl; Indie the Barred Owl; and Ruby the Red-Tailed Hawk. Tawny had roused her feathers before Nicole presented her, and the audience audibly admired her exquisite cinnamon and black coloration. Puck, presented by Barb, elicited many "aw's" at his cuteness, and when Barb brought out Indie, you could hear the wonder at the owl's size and dark-eyed beauty. As always, guests responded to Ruby's powerful stature as she sat patiently on Nicole's forearm.