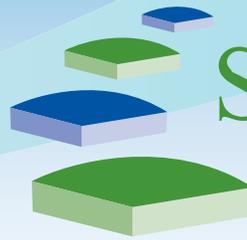


ALBERTA BIRDS OF PREY CENTRE



Birds of Prey Centre soars to success

It was a project that began in an effort to curb the effects of heavy rainfall in Coaldale. Now, more than two decades later, the initiative has not only succeeded in its original purpose, but it has become one of Canada's best known wildlife rescue facilities.

The Alberta Birds of Prey Centre was built in 1989 and opened to the public in 1991. Landscaped ponds were built not only to act as a water retention method, but also to reclaim lost prairie wetland and complement the facility's role as a nature centre.

The centre specializes in many areas, including the rescue and release of injured birds of prey, conservation of threatened and endangered species, as well as environmental education. Partnering with the Town of Coaldale and many other businesses and agencies, the centre has exceeded expectations and become a tourist staple in southern Alberta.

"Our day-to-day operations involve connecting with all regional communities," says managing director Colin Weir, who has been looking after injured birds since 1983, and notes he has always had a passion for wildlife.

The centre's contributions have won numerous awards for its dynamic team approach to developing practical solutions as well as conserving endangered species.

Weir says they are appreciative of the awards they've received, as it exemplifies what can be accomplished when co-operation and collaboration are involved in a project. Weir notes the list of partnerships and connections are many and diverse.

These connections include picking up or receiving injured birds, giving guided tours to schools or entertaining visitors as a tourist attraction. The organization runs on 10 staff in the summer, two in the winter, and volunteers all year round.

"When we release injured birds, we often travel to communities where the birds originated and invite the local media, so these regional communities are reminded of our service to them," says Weir.

Support partners include Alberta Environment, FortisAlberta, Sunrise Poultry, Chinook Country Tourist Association, Alberta Tourism, Alberta Fish & Wildlife, and many others. Weir accredits the success of the project to this collective support, and says it couldn't have happened otherwise. Weir indicates the centre has many plans for the future.

"We want to work on elevating the quality of the site and the magnitude of the regional benefits we provide," he says.

Did you know:

- The Centre's emphasis is on birds of prey and visitors can gain hands-on knowledge about owls, eagles, hawks and falcons through wildlife exhibits and active participation.
- The highlight of the tour is the "hawk-walk" or flying fields where free-flying demonstrations of specially trained falcons, hawks, and eagles are conducted hourly.
- Birds of Prey is located on a wetland site north of Highway #3 and just west of Secondary Highway 845.
- Centre founders are Wendy Slaytor and Colin Weir.
- It took the help of MLA Bob Bogle and then Fish & Wildlife Minister Don Sparrow granting special ministerial permission to start their volunteer wildlife rescue work since there was no provision for private individuals to possess wildlife.

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