

The Nature Center's a Hoot!

by Jamie Kelley, Naturalist, Pioneers Park Nature Center

Have you visited our feathered friends lately? The Nature Center is home to many non-releasable raptors including a barred owl, great horned owls, barn owl, screech owls, red tailed hawks, and turkey vultures. These birds are not able to live in the wild on their own and have found their way to the Nature Center, many via Raptor Recovery – a bird rehabilitation center in Bellevue, NE at Fontenelle Forest.

Raptors, or birds of prey, are all excellent hunters. Hawks and falcons rely on their excellent vision to hunt while in flight or perched during the day. Owls use their keen hearing to help them detect food in the night.



Photo Courtesy of Adrian Olivera

Turkey vultures are a bit different because they eat food that is already dead, or carrion. Turkey Vultures rely on their sense of smell to detect their food. All raptors are also characterized by their hook beaks with strong edges and their feet with sharp, curved talons. Raptors eat other animals which may include small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects, rodents, and other birds.

Around Lincoln, the most common hawk you may see are red-tailed hawks – these remain in Nebraska all year long. When in flight you can see their rusty red tail feathers. Look for red-tailed hawks perched on light or telephone poles next to open fields. You may also often see turkey vultures in the warmer months. You can easily identify a turkey vulture by its wobbly flight, riding thermals (making circles) in the sky, with their large wings stretched in the shape of a V. Owls are harder to see because they are more active at night, however, you may hear one call in your neighborhood. A barred owl's call sounds like "who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all?" while a great horned owl's call sounds more like a soft hoot "hoo-h' HOO-hoo-hoo."

Come out this fall to hike the trails and visit our resident raptors, many of their enclosures are located along the animal trail loop. Stop into the visitor center for a map and to visit our other live animals including snakes and turtles. While out on the trails you may also see bison and elk that also live at the Nature Center. Some of our birds also help with educational programs and are out in the community at schools and other events. Whether on the trails at the Nature Center or out and about stop by to say "Hi" and learn more about these feather friends. The Nature Center, located on the west end of Pioneers Park, 3201 S. Coddington in Lincoln, is open Mon-Saturday from 8:30 am – 5:00 pm and Sunday, noon-5pm. We hope to see you soon.

