

Released

Back to the Wild

Full Circle by Mo Lannan

*Little did I know
that when I went for
my first solo capture
of a hawk, that it
would end up going
"full circle."*



On March 20th, I received a call at home about a downed hawk in Templeton. The phone volunteer was unable to find a transporter, and asked if I could go to rescue/capture it. (I am also a phone volunteer but it's few and far between that I go out to capture.) However, being that raptors are a passion of mine; I told them I would try my best (as I had never captured a hawk on my own). I went to the site, and saw the red-tailed hawk on the ground, with a left drooping wing. As I approached, it did offer a bit of resistance, but with a quick drop of a towel over the bird (to cover his eyes and to reduce stress), I was able to capture him. It went so smoothly, I impressed myself!

I took him immediately to the PWC Center, where he was examined and it was confirmed he did have an injury to his left wing. Throughout the next week, I would check on him whenever I went to the Center.

Then, one day he was gone! "Oh no, where is he?" I wondered. It turned out he had been transferred to Kelly (one of our permitted rehabbers) who has a large flight cage on her property which is used for raptors to recuperate before release.

A funny "French" word:

About a month after this incident, Claudia (one of our Center Supervisors) put out a call for anyone interested in being trained in "creance." PWC wanted to go a step further in our rehab program for raptors, and start creancing them prior to release.

What is "creance" you might ask?! Creance is actually the name of the long, light line used to "tether" a raptor (or falcon for training purposes). Before releasing a rehabilitating raptor, we must make sure he/she has enough strength in their wings to hunt and thrive back out in the wild. No different than when a human breaks a limb: we need to go to physical therapy.



An anklet, and jesses are placed on the raptor's leg, then, a lead-line is attached to the jesse, and on the end of the lead-line a creance is attached (made of either fishing line, or nylon cord, depending upon the weight of the raptor). The creance is attached to a large fishing reel that allows the bird to fly but only the length of the line.

Next steps:

The raptor is taken to a wide-open area that is human and dog-free. We place it on a perch, remove its hood or towel and watch them as they fly up to 150 feet away, slowing down their flight using pressure on the line as they reach the end of their tether. We observe their wings, feet, breathing.. etc. to determine if it is ready for release.

After I had taken the creance class and read the manual, I had to wait for a raptor that was ready to be released. Soon, an e-mail came to us from Claudia, stating she had a raptor ready for creance. Finally, it was time for our first creance experience. On Saturday we all met at the Center to get the hawk ready... Much to my surprise, it was the hawk that I had captured back in March! What a thrill!

There had been some concern as its blood levels had been low, but after getting results of a new blood test, weighing and checking him out in general, it was determined we could take him out for his first longer, rehab flights.

A local school offered the perfect site. The creance was attached, we placed him on the perch, removed his hood, and stood back and watched as Virginia held onto the reel. After a few minutes, off he flew. Observing the flight, we noticed his wings looked great! We continued this and after his third flight, we could see he was getting winded. In addition, there were gulls and crows around who were beginning to get very annoyed about the whole thing, and were making quite a ruckus! We did two more flights and took him back to the Center.

Three days later, we met again at the Center for another creance session with the hawk. Claudia and Marcelle had done the pre-exam and readied him before my arrival. He seemed fit and ready to go, and then it starts to sprinkle... Hmmm, were we going to be able to do this today? By the time we reached our destination (a large, empty field we had been given permission to use just a few miles from the center) it had stopped raining.

Again we set him up, stood back and waited. Within seconds, he was off... again and again and again. That day he did *ten* flights, his wings and legs were doing beautifully and he was not out of breath!!!

After this session, was determined that he would not need the next scheduled creance, but the time had come to be able to set him free!!!

Excitement mounts:

On Thursday, Kelly made arrangements to get him banded (in hopes of re-connecting with him if he were found again) We all met at the original rescue site. Kelly, Virginia, her brother-in-law, Mike, and I were all there for the release as well as Mr. Jensen (the original "rescuer") who was thrilled that we were bringing him back and stood ready with his camera. Kelly put on her leather gloves, removed the hawk from the crate, placed him on her arm, and we patiently waited.

He looked around, and did not yet realizing that he was anklet and jesse-free, he just sat there. Kelly added a bit of up and down movement of her arm and he took off: first flying to a nearby pine tree.



There he stayed, looking at his surroundings as a scrub jay stopped nearby to see what he is doing in the jay's turf. He then turned, looked at us....and off he flew to freedom!



And there you have it: full circle! *This is* what "it is all about" (for those of us who volunteer for PWC and all the wonderful people who call us to help these injured and orphaned animals): **the release!** (No matter that we cared for this hawk for two months, had vet and food bills, with the successful release, well, *that is priceless!!!*)