

## Roots & Shoots Raptor Care



### Time needed

30 minutes for journal page.  
Project is ongoing.

### Cost

None

### Weather requirement

None

### Advance preparation

Locate and contact a raptor rehab center in your area.

Decide which project option you will do.

## EcoTeam Lesson 4: Predator/Prey Relationships

### Overview

The EcoTeam Predator/Prey lesson introduces students to the relationship between predators and prey through dissection of owl pellets. Owls are part of a group of birds called raptors that possess three features to help them hunt their prey. In this Roots & Shoots activity, students examine these features and connect them to the predator/prey concept. The class will complete a project that benefits raptors in wildlife rehabilitation centers. Assisting such a center shows care and concern for the individual animals and helps the centers educate people on the importance of raptor conservation.

### Background Information for Facilitator

Owls belong to a group of birds called “raptors” or birds of prey. There are 61 species of raptors in North America, including owls, eagles, condors, falcons, hawks, kites and kestrels. Owls and other raptors possess some special adaptations that help them excel as hunters and set them apart from other birds. The three defining physical characteristics of raptors are:

- Sharp grasping talons used for seizing and carrying prey while in flight.
- Curved beaks used to kill and consume prey.
- Keen eyesight used to spot prey from far away.

Predators at the top of their food chain are often good indicators of the health of an ecosystem. If there is any disturbance in a food chain, it is magnified at each successive level and shows most clearly in the few top predators that depend upon many prey species for their food supply. Owls and other birds of prey are good examples of top predators.

As land is converted for human use, the availability of hunting and nesting habitat for birds of prey typically decreases. Thousands of birds of prey are injured each year due to interaction with humans, such as gunshot wounds, collisions with cars or power lines, poisonings and loss of habitat. Many of these birds are rehabilitated at wildlife centers and released back into the wild. These centers also provide educational programs to promote the conservation of raptors and their habitat. Measures that conserve birds of prey often provide an umbrella of protection for entire ecosystems. Assisting raptor rehabilitation centers benefits the individual animals and helps the centers educate people on the importance of raptor conservation.

### **Materials**

See Options in Procedures section

### **Procedures**

#### **Getting Ready**

Locate the nearest wildlife center that does raptor rehabilitation. The Carolina Raptor Center’s web page provides links to many other centers (<http://www.birdsofprey.org/links.htm>). The Wildlife Rehabilitation Information Directory has a list of wildlife rehabilitators by state, though not all deal with birds of prey (<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~devo0028/contact.htm>). You can also use a web-based search engine to locate a wildlife rehabilitation center in your state.

**Option A:** Collect “wish list” items for a raptor rehab center.

If the center is within driving distance, you may want to hold a drive at your school to collect items on their “wish list” (similar to a canned food drive). Get a current list of supplies needed at the rehab center. Some commonly needed items are paper towels, cotton balls, dry dog food, dishwashing detergent, and office supplies. Set boxes in a public area with a sign telling what items are needed. Notify parents of the drive through the letter home and other students through morning announcements. Hold the drive for a week or two and then take your donations to the center. If possible, make it a field trip so students can see some of the birds they are helping!

**Option B:** Make enrichment items for raptors in rehab centers with cardboard tubes and boxes. If the nearest raptor rehab center is not within driving distance, you can make something that will benefit the birds at the center that can be mailed. “Enrichment” is anything that improves the quality of life of animals in captivity by offering them social opportunity, mental stimulation, or physical challenges. Ask the staff at the center if there are any special enrichment items your class could make for their birds. Some zookeepers (such as those at Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo and Utah’s Hogle Zoo) have made enrichment items for birds of prey in captivity with cardboard tubes and boxes. Food items are inserted into the objects to create physical challenges. Other zookeepers have used cardboard egg cartons to hide food in as enrichment. Some rehab centers use tennis balls for enrichment for their captive birds. It is best to contact a center, make some suggestions and see what they could use the most!

**Option C:** Raise funds for a rehab center by selling aluminum cans to a local recycling center. Place a box in the cafeteria and others next to soda machines in the school. Place signs around the box stating what project funds will benefit (e.g. “Recycle for Raptors”). Using the phone book, locate a local recycling center that will pay for aluminum cans; most centers pay by the pound (e.g. Blue Ridge Metal Recycling, 9 Mulvaney St., Asheville, NC 28803 (828)254-2840). You will need a volunteer to take the cans to the center. After collection period has ended, report to the class how much was raised and send it to the rehab center.

### **Doing the Activity**

Before you hand out the student journal page, remind students of their experience with the owl pellets. Ask them what senses or special body parts predators use to help them find and catch their prey. Record their results on the board.

Hand out the student journal page and “raptor features” page. Read the first page of the journal together. Allow time for them to complete the activity and share their raptors with the class. Then tell them how the class is going to help raptors (which option you have chosen) and some details on the activity.

### **Sources**

Audubon’s Center for Birds of Prey. *Audubon’s Adopt-a-Bird Program*. <http://www.adoptabird.org> (5 Sep. 2002)

The Fort Worth Zoo’s Enrichment Online. <http://www.enrichmentonline.org>. (29 Aug. 2002).

Illinois Raptor Center. *What else can a kid do?* <http://www.illinoisraptorcenter.org/kids.html>. (20 Aug. 2002)

Lane, Carolyn and Mike Kennedy. *Radical Raptor*. <http://www.raptor.umn.edu/content.asp?page=3102> (21 Aug. 2002).

The Raptor Center at Auburn University. *What are Raptors*. [http://www.vetmed.auburn.edu/raptor/what\\_are\\_raptors/index.html](http://www.vetmed.auburn.edu/raptor/what_are_raptors/index.html). (21 Aug. 2002).

Name \_\_\_\_\_



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## EcoTeam Lesson 4: Raptor Care

As you explored your owl pellet, you saw evidence of a predator and its prey. An owl is an expert predator and has some features that help it hunt for its prey. What do predators use to help them find and catch their prey?

An owl is a special kind of bird called a **raptor**, or bird of prey. Some other raptors are eagles, hawks, and falcons. All raptors have three features in common that help them catch the prey they need to eat in order to survive:

- Raptors have **great eyesight!** Their eyesight, which is eight times better than that of humans, helps them locate prey while they are flying high in the sky.
- All raptors have sharp claws, called **talons**, which help them catch, hold and carry their prey.
- Raptors have **curved or hooked beaks** that help them kill and eat their prey.

Many raptors are hurt each year through collisions with cars or power lines, poisonings, and loss of nesting and hunting areas. Because these injuries are the result of contact with humans, we have created places that help raptors that are hurt. These places, called rehabilitation or “rehab” centers, help the birds recover and release them back into the wild. Some raptor rehab centers use birds that cannot be released back into the wild to educate people about raptors. Your class will be doing a project that helps birds at a rehab center.

Follow the directions on the Raptor Features page to create your own imaginary raptor. It will have the three raptor features that make them great hunters. Below, write a few sentences about your raptor. Include where it lives, how it hunts for prey, and what kind of prey it eats.

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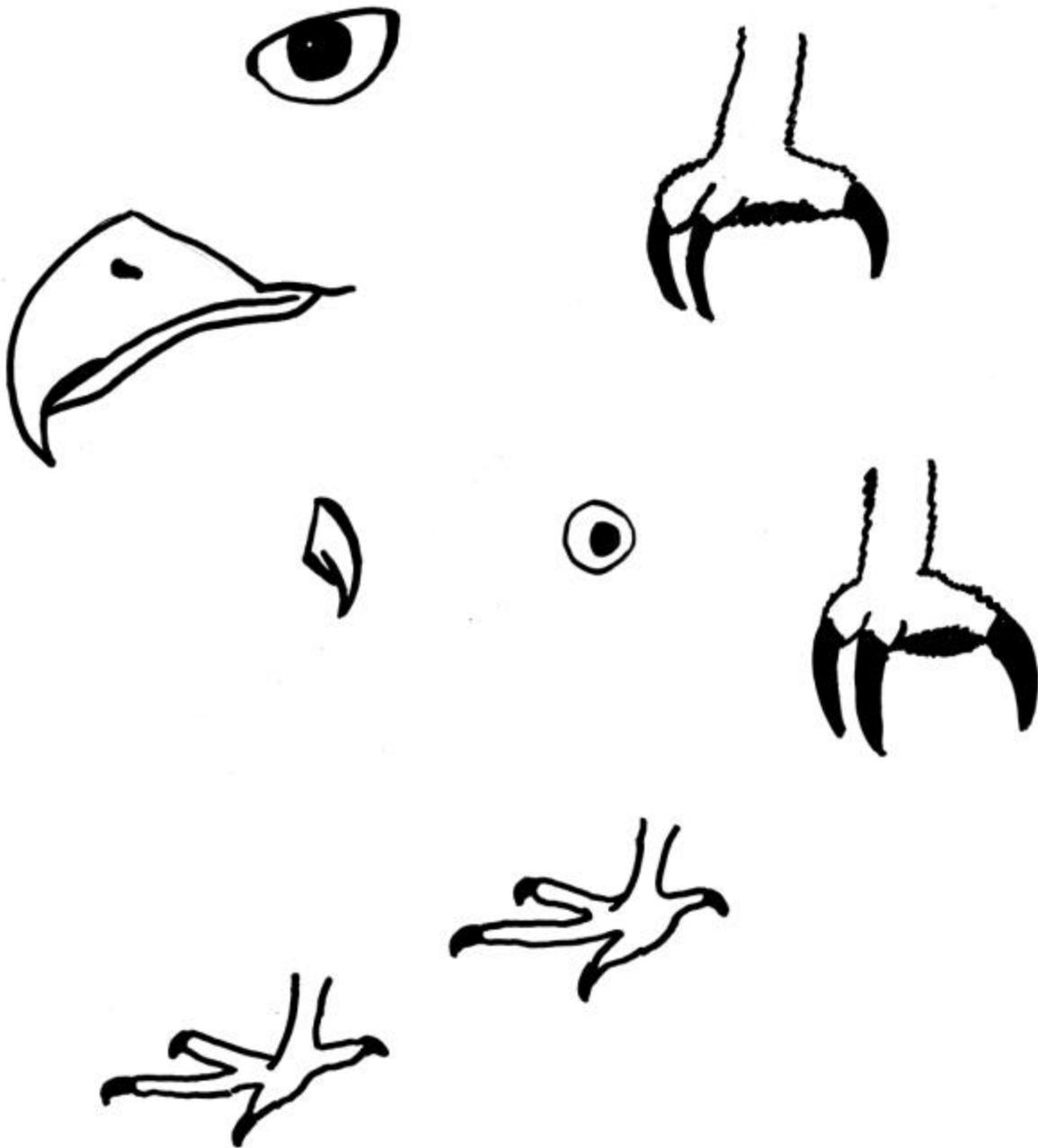
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**A member of the Roots & Shoots  
Oakland Zoo Teens holds a raptor.**

# *RAPTOR FEATURES*

Cut out one hooked beak, two legs with sharp, curved talons, and one eye for powerful vision. Paste them on a blank sheet of paper and draw your own raptor around them.





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Dear Parent or Guardian,

As part of the EcoTeam curriculum, your child has been learning about predator/prey relationships. Our class examined owl pellets (a combination of fur and bones from prey that an owl coughs up) to see the diet of owls. Owls are part of a group of birds called raptors, which also includes eagles, hawks and falcons. The class learned that many raptors are injured each year through interaction with humans, such as collisions with cars or power lines and poisoning, and that their habitat is at risk. Many wildlife centers work to improve this situation by rehabilitating raptors and releasing them back into the wild. Raptor Rehab centers also provide education programs to promote the conservation of raptors and their habitat.

As a Roots & Shoots project, our class is holding a drive to collect items on the “wish list” of

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If you have any of the following items around your home, please consider donating them to benefit the birds of the rehab center:

Thank you for helping us show care and concern for our local raptors. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,