

# Charli Rohack: A Remarkable Woman and Her Raptors

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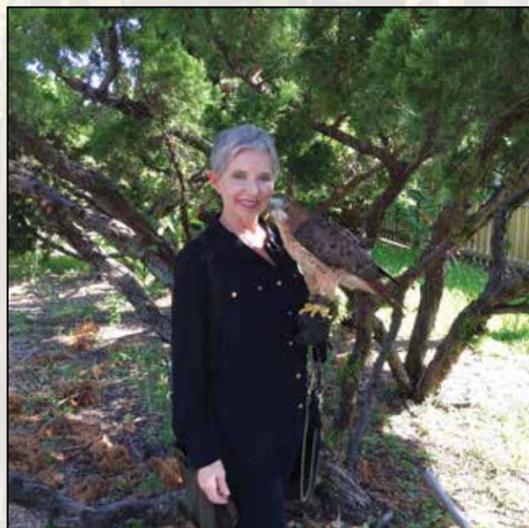
Galveston resident, Charli Rohack, is no stranger to birds of prey. The nerves in her left hand are numb due to a Bald Eagle whose tight squeeze went right through her Kevlar glove. A hawk that had been rescued out of a sewer put his talon through her thumb. "I got a little too confident when I picked him up," she said. Yet, it's all part of the vocation she has chosen for herself with no regrets.

As a Wildlife Rehabilitator for over 20 years, Rohack has rescued and rehabilitated countless raptors and given them a second chance at life. Her fascination with birds in general began when she found an injured rail bird while she and her husband were living on acreage in Bryan, Texas. "It had a broken leg," she said. "So, I took it to Texas A&M and asked for their help." The bird got the medical attention needed, but Rohack was not allowed to keep the bird because she lacked certain permits. Today, Rohack has those permits from U.S. Fish & Wildlife, Texas Parks & Wildlife, an Eagle permit and a Falconry permit. Upon moving back to her hometown of Galveston three years ago, she started Galveston Seabird Patrol networking with the Wildlife Center of Texas in Houston that graciously accepts all of Galveston's birds. To date, close to 800 birds have been rescued, which includes 400 pelicans. She has recently closed her triage area in her garage as it was not a long-term solution for the need.

Her main concern now are her rescued birds of prey, also known as raptors. There are three defining factors that make a bird of prey: it eats meat, sometimes hunted, sometimes carrion (dead);



**There is no wildlife that we as humans are not slowly decimating by our lack of concern and unconscious living. Every single thing we do as humans impacts something or someone down the line – Nikki Andruik**



Charli Rohack and Sky

it has superb vision with a wide binocular range, and it catches its food with its feet. The raptors that happily reside in comfortable living quarters in Rohack's large backyard are: two red-tailed hawks, a great horned owl, and five screech owls. To get them back into the wild and hunting again, Rohack rehabilitates them using falconry techniques. One of the owls suffered an eye injury from being hit by a car and another owl has an injured

wing. One of the hawks is missing all his talons and half of his toes on one foot. "I'm going to train him as a falconry bird to hunt with one foot," she said. "I'll be close by to protect him, so I want to see what he does. By training, he's got to come back to my glove, and once we establish a partnership, he'll form a bond with me."

And then there is Sky, a red-tailed hawk that Rohack rescued two years ago. He is a handsome fellow and quite attached to Rohack, who lets him out of his quarters to hunt and get exercise nine months out of the year. "I don't let any of the raptors out during the summer, because that is when they're molting (losing their feathers), plus it's unethical for a falconer to hunt during the time when wildlife are having babies." But Rohack makes sure her birds get an ample supply of their usual fare.

Rohack, petite in stature, is not the kind of woman you'd expect to be handling these sorts of birds—some half her size. Yet, with calmness, patience, her years of experience, and the trust she builds between herself and these raptors, the bond they ultimately form is strong and assuring.

"People need to understand these birds; many are afraid of them," she said. "They are such a benefit to society, yet their injuries are mostly from human encroachment." Rohack has definitely found

her life's calling and lucky for Sky and others like him, they might just be the luckier ones. As of this writing, Rohack is searching for a place to reopen her triage in Galveston.

What Charli Rohack wants you to know about birds of prey and birds in general:

- This year is the 100th anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1916 which protects all birds including backyard birds, except introduced species. There are two species that are not protected: the English sparrow and the European starling.
- The Good Samaritan rescue is legal, but you cannot take care of any migratory birds without a permit. It is even illegal to possess feathers of a protected bird. If you find the feather of a Blue Jay on the ground, you should leave it alone. You can buy dyed feathers, generally from domestic ducks, guinea fowl, and chickens—they are not migratory birds.
- Only 20% of all birds of prey make it to adulthood.
- Most birds of prey mate for life.
- Birds of prey have little sense of smell; their hunting skills are instinctive.
- Great horned owls: one of their favorite foods is skunk.
- Cooper's hawks only eat other birds.
- The osprey, which is common in Galveston, only eat fish.
- The only birds of prey that are cannibalistic are the screech owls. Their favorite food is the big tree roaches, but if food gets scarce, they will prey on each other.
- Birds of prey don't kill for sport, just for food. They miss seven out of 10 times.
- If you had the eyesight of the hawk, you could read the fine print of a newspaper from one end of a football field to the other.
- Falconry is the training of a bird of prey to hunt quarry and return to the glove. It requires long hours of skill and devotion. It is not a hobby, but a lifestyle.

According to the International Center of Birds of Prey, there are 307 different species of the diurnal birds of prey (those that hunt during the day: hawks, falcons, eagles, buzzards) living in habitats from bleak deserts to thick forests. Of the nocturnal birds of prey (owls) there are 205 species hunting everything from bats to fish. Raptors are divided into six main groups:

**Strigidae** (owls) are the least related to all the other birds of prey. Usually hunting at night, they generally see in black and white, and tones of grey. They have specially adapted feathers which allow them to fly silently, and this silent flight allows them to utilize their incredible hearing to help locate prey. **Cathartidae** are all the vultures that live in North and South America. The biggest raptor in the world belongs to this group, the Andean condor. The smallest are the turkey vultures and black vultures. **Pandionida**. The osprey is the only member of this group and feeds only on fresh fish. **Sagittaridae**. The very odd secretary bird; they kill snakes and grasshoppers. **Accipitridae** are the largest group of



Bald Eagle



Cooper's Hawk



Buzzard



Great Horned Owl



Screech Owl



Crested Caracara



Peregrine Falcon



Red-Tailed Hawk



Osprey Pair



Turkey & Black Vultures

raptors, and includes vultures, eagles, hawks, buzzards, kites and others. **Falconidae**. The Kestrel, the Peregrine, the Merlin, and the Gyr are all examples of the falcons. They have long pointed wings, nearly all have brown eyes, and live in open countryside hunting from a great height and stooping fast towards their quarry.