



Spring 2026



Dear Friends,

Spring is both an exciting and demanding season at the Auburn University Raptor Center. As migration moves overhead and nesting season begins, our work in conservation, education, and rehabilitation takes on a renewed sense of purpose.

This season brings new patients into our care, opportunities for student learning, and meaningful moments to connect our community with raptors and the natural world. It also marks the beginning of orphan season, one of our busiest periods in rehabilitation, as young raptors arrive in need of care and a chance to return to the wild.

This spring has also been a season of new beginnings for our outreach efforts. We were proud to host our first [Talons, Taps, and Trivia](#), bringing together supporters and new friends in a relaxed setting to learn more about raptors and the work happening at AURC. Seeing our community gather in support of these birds reminds us that conservation is strongest when people feel personally connected to the mission.

We are also looking ahead to one of our favorite traditions, [Wing Fling](#), coming up on April 17. Wing Fling is a family-friendly educational bird show held in our amphitheater, where visitors can experience raptors in flight while learning about their natural history and conservation.

[Tiger Giving Day](#) returns to its traditional spring date on March 25. This year, we are raising funds for customized travel carriers for our educational ambassadors. These carriers will allow our birds to travel safely and comfortably as they visit classrooms, community events, and campus programs, supporting nearly 300 educational programs each year. Your support on Tiger Giving Day helps ensure that our ambassadors continue to enjoy the highest standards of care.

Spring reminds us that hard work, given time and support, can take root and flourish. None of this happens without the community that stands behind us. Your support makes it possible for these birds to receive expert care and for our mission to continue growing

in meaningful ways. Thank you for being part of the Auburn University Raptor Center and the difference we make together.

CONSERVATION



A Silent Threat: Protecting Bald Eagles from Lead in Our Community

Written by Katie Pnewski- Raptor Specialist III

At the Auburn University Raptor Center, we're fortunate to spend every day working with some of the most iconic birds in North America both on our rehabilitation side and also with our Education Ambassadors. Bald eagles are one of America's greatest conservation comeback stories, but their recovery still faces a quiet, serious threat: lead. At the Auburn University Raptor Center, we see how small choices in the field can have big impacts on raptors' health. This article explains what lead poisoning is, how eagles are exposed, what it does to their bodies, and how simple changes, especially by hunters and anglers, can make a lasting difference.

Eagles are back thanks to decades of protection, conservation projects, and community support. Even so, they still face modern stressors, and lead is one of the most preventable. Because bald eagles are opportunistic scavengers, they're at risk when they feed on carcasses or gut piles that contain tiny fragments of lead ammunition, or when prey items carry lead sinkers or jigs.

So how does lead get inside of an eagle? Lead core bullets often fragment on impact into hundreds of microscopic shards that can spread far beyond the initial wound. When eagles scavenge unrecovered game or gut piles, those fragments can be eaten without anyone realizing it. Angling adds another route: lost or ingested lead tackle can move up the food chain to top predators. A sliver of lead, smaller than a grain of rice, can be lethal to an adult eagle. Raptors digest bone, fur, fish scales, and muscle with ease. That same digestive efficiency means that even microscopic lead flakes are quickly broken down and absorbed. Because a lead fragment does not need to be large to dissolve, the amount required to cause organ damage is incredibly small. Lead is a neurotoxin. In eagles, it can cause weakness, lack of coordination, seizures, and impaired vision, along with damage to the liver, kidneys, and gastrointestinal system.

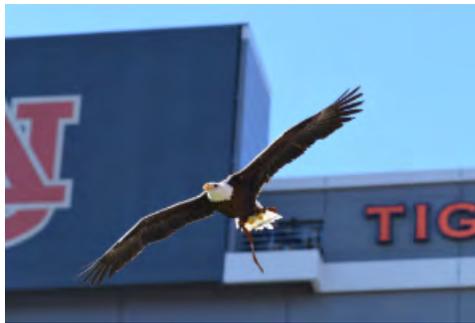
Sometimes symptoms are subtle.

Long running monitoring projects have repeatedly documented lead entering eagle territories. Researchers have recovered lead sinkers, shot, and weights in or beneath active nest which shows direct evidence of how fishing and hunting materials end up in the food web. Sampling of nestling blood and feathers across multiple years provides a consistent picture. Lead shows up often enough in these samples to warrant continued attention and prevention.

Wildlife hospitals regularly admit bald eagles with measurable lead levels, with cases often clustering around and after hunting seasons when scavenging increases. Care can involve chelation therapy, fluids, nutrition support, and time in large flight enclosures so birds can rebuild stamina and coordination before a release is considered. Despite best efforts, some eagles suffer permanent neurological effects that prevent release.

[Read Full Article](#)

EDUCATION



Ambassador Highlight: Spirit the Bald Eagle

Written by Andrea McCravy - Raptor Specialist III

If you've ever attended an Auburn University Raptor Center (AURC) program or watched the pre-game festivities at an Auburn home football game, you may already know Spirit, one of the two Bald Eagles who calls the AURC home. This year, Spirit celebrates her 30th birthday, or as staff call it, her "Birdy Thirty", making her the oldest bird currently in our care.

Spirit's story began in 1996 when she was brought to a Florida rehabilitation center as a fledgling after being found with both a wing injury and significant damage to her beak. While her wing healed, her beak injury could not be fully repaired, ultimately making her non-releasable.

She arrived at the AURC in 1998 and has called it home ever since. Spirit made history on September 28, 2002, when she completed her first pre-game flight in Jordan-Hare Stadium, becoming the first Bald Eagle to participate in this iconic Auburn tradition. After an extraordinary career that included 47 pre-game flights, Spirit officially retired from her game-day duties in 2021. Shortly before her retirement, she was honored with the title of Honorary War Eagle, a tribute to her lasting impact on the Auburn community.

It's easy to understand why Spirit is one of our most beloved ambassadors. Those wishing to meet her may do so by booking a private tour, which also includes the opportunity to meet the 21 other raptors who reside at the center.

Here's to Spirit: 30 years strong, forever soaring in the hearts of the Auburn family.

REHABILITATION



The hawk who wanted to be a Tiger

By: Stephanie Kadletz, Assistant Director, Raptor Rehabilitation, MNR, CWR, CET

Cooper's hawk 2026-031 took flight back into the wild on February 13th at the Auburn University Davis Arboretum, wrapping up a rescue story that started in a unique location on campus: the AU indoor football practice facility.

A few weeks ago, 031 slipped inside the building, likely while chasing smaller birds, and quickly became the most agile "player" on the field. And honestly, with their speed, agility, and lightning-fast reflexes, Cooper's hawks would make pretty impressive running backs. These raptors are built for high-speed pursuits through dense forests: long tails for steering, short rounded wings for tight turns, and a hunting style that's basically the avian version of a blitz.

But that same agility can get them into trouble. Once inside a large building, Cooper's hawks often struggle to find their way back out. After five days in the facility, 031 finally came down to a specialized trap designed for indoor rescues, allowing staff to safely capture her and bring her into care.

She arrived dehydrated and underweight, common issues for raptors stuck indoors without access to food or water but responded well to treatment. After medical evaluation, rehydration, and conditioning to rebuild her strength and maneuverability, she was ready to return to the wild.

The Davis Arboretum offered the perfect release site, with native trees, natural cover, and plenty of hunting opportunities. Watching 031 rise above the treetops was a moment worth celebrating, a reminder of the resilience of wildlife and the importance of giving these birds a second chance.

Here's hoping she sticks to hunting outdoors from now on, instead of joining football practice again.



TIGER GIVING DAY



The Power of Giving: Soaring Together

By: Diana Turner - Senior Director of
Advancement for the College of
Veterinary Medicine

At the Auburn University Raptor Center, generosity is the force that allows our mission to take flight. We are deeply grateful to the donors whose continued support sustains our work and strengthens the impact we have on raptors, students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. Because of you, care, conservation, education, and tradition come together in powerful and lasting ways.

Your gifts make it possible for injured and orphaned raptors to receive expert medical care, rehabilitation, and—whenever possible—a return to the wild. Each success story reflects not only clinical excellence, but also the compassion and commitment of those who believe in protecting these magnificent birds. For raptors that cannot be released, your generosity allows them to serve as ambassadors, inspiring thousands through educational programs and outreach efforts that promote conservation and respect for wildlife.

Education lies at the heart of everything we do. Donor support provides Auburn University students with unparalleled hands-on learning opportunities, allowing them to engage directly in rehabilitation, research, and public education. These experiences shape future veterinarians, scientists, educators, and conservation leaders—individuals who carry forward the values of stewardship and service long after their time at Auburn. Faculty and staff, empowered by donor-funded resources, are able to mentor, innovate, and advance best practices in raptor medicine and wildlife education.

Your impact also extends to one of Auburn's most cherished traditions: the War Eagle Flights. These iconic moments unite the Auburn family, symbolizing strength, resilience, and pride. Behind every flight is a commitment to exceptional care, training, and conservation—made possible through philanthropy. Donor support ensures that these raptors are cared for with the highest standards, allowing tradition and responsibility to soar together.

Beyond campus, your generosity enriches our community. Through outreach programs, partnerships, and educational experiences, people of all ages gain a deeper understanding of raptors and their role in healthy ecosystems. These moments spark curiosity, foster connection, and inspire a shared sense of responsibility for the natural world.

Philanthropy at the Auburn University Raptor Center is about more than funding programs—it is about shared purpose. Whether through annual gifts, special initiatives, or legacy commitments, your support fuels learning, preserves tradition, and protects wildlife.

On behalf of our raptors, our students, our faculty and staff—and the **very grateful Advancement team**—thank you. We are honored by your trust and deeply appreciative of your partnership. Together, we continue to soar.

[Add to Google Calendar](#)

[Add to Outlook/iCal](#)

EVENTS



Wing Fling:

Friday, April 17, 2026 - [Tickets](#)

Huntsville Botanical Gardens:

Thursday, March 19, 2026 - Shows at 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. - [Tickets](#)

[College of Veterinary Medicine Vet Fest:](#)

Saturday, April 11, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m..

[Delta Woods and Waters Expo:](#)

Saturday, April 25, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m..

[Dadeville Public Library:](#)

Tuesday, June 9, 2026 at 11:00 a.m..

SUPPORT



One of the ways you can support the Auburn University Raptor Center is by sending frequently used items. We have created an [Amazon wish list](#) so you can easily see some of those items and we can easily update based on our needs. Please note that the supplies listed are just the types of items we frequently use, you are more than welcome to send us different brands, sizes, or use the store of your choice!

Wishlist



AUBURN UNIVERSITY

College of Veterinary Medicine

We rely on the generosity and support of individuals, corporations and foundations to advance our mission. By donating to our facility, you are providing vital resources to ensure we deliver outstanding medical care to our patients undergoing rehabilitation and high quality educational presentations to the community. To learn about different ways to give or for more information, please contact the Auburn College of Veterinary Medicine Advancement team at giving@vetmed.auburn.edu or call (334) 844-1446.

Donate



Learn more about the [Auburn University Raptor Center](#), a division of the Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine.