

**Citizen Stewardship at Canyon Ranch** by Carrie Dean, Education Program Manager, and Megan Mosby, Executive Director, Liberty Wildlife

Via funding from the Arizona Community Foundation, Tucson Audubon Society has been participating in a Citizen Stewardship coalition to create portable programming to improve people's relationships with and understanding of our natural heritage, and in particular, animals, whether domestic or wild, and their habitat.

On a chilly December afternoon, Tucson Audubon Society and Liberty Wildlife, out of Phoenix, joined forces to give a two-hour presentation to the guests at Canyon Ranch in Tucson. The topic, of course, was how to promote citizen stewardship through a Living with Urban Wildlife presentation and interpretive lessons about eight live raptors. Although there were no attendees for the Living with Urban Wildlife PowerPoint, eight people soon joined us for the live raptor section of the afternoon, and by the time the presentations were under way, the audience had grown to 15.

Five Liberty Wildlife volunteers – Jan Miller, Joe Miller, Max Bessler, Anne Peyton, and Claudia Kirschner – joined Liberty Wildlife Executive Director Megan Mosby for the drive from Phoenix to Tucson with eight birds for this incredible program. Participants were in awe of the smallest raptors, a burrowing owl and American kestrel, to the largest, a bald eagle! One of the participants, a six-year-old boy, was overheard throughout the program to say, “Really? I didn’t know that!” and “Ooh, be careful” when the bald eagle flapped her great wings. And another participant was brought to tears at the chance to see and learn about these great animals up close. In addition to the raptors already mentioned, guests learned about a black vulture and were able to compare a ferruginous hawk and a great horned owl. And a treat for all was the free flight of a Harris’ hawk; everyone gasped and giggled as the hawk almost brushed our heads as it flew from handler to handler! As the grand finale, one lucky guest held and then released a rehabilitated red-tailed hawk within Canyon Ranch grounds. The hawk quickly flew to a nearby tree, which piqued the interest of resident birds who investigated their new neighbor.

On the whole, the enthusiasm and involvement of those who attended made up for the low turnout, and I feel confident that the guests came away from the program with a new appreciation for and renewed interest in the need to protect not only the animals but their habitats too. What more can I say, except, what an amazing experience!