



The red-tailed hawk is a keen observer which enables him to hunt for food, usually rabbits and squirrels but since he is also known as a chickenhawk, he sometimes will prey on chickens and other small animals.



Dewey Matney has worked with his bird long enough that the bird trusts him and is very comfortable being around him even though it is a bird of prey.

Matneys practice falconry

DALE CURRY
STAFF WRITER

Dewey and Blair Matney of the Exie community are involved in falconry, one of the oldest sports known to mankind.

“There are documents showing that falconry was practiced as far back as four thousand years ago,” Dewey said.

Falconry is the sport of maintaining, caring for and hunting with a bird of prey.

Dewey and Blair each have a raptor with which they are now working. Dewey’s is a red tailed hawk and Blair’s is a red shouldered hawk. As far as they know, they are the only two falconers who have been trained in Green County.

Several steps are required to become a licensed falconer including completing an application, passing an examination, having their facilities and equipment inspected, and providing a letter from another licensed falconer who is willing to serve as a sponsor for the prospective falconer.

Dewey and Blair are both apprentice falconers but Dewey will move up in class this Summer and will become a member of the general class of falconers, perhaps on his way to become a part of the master class. The length of time to become a master falconer is seven years.

“To start with, traditionally, a person must catch a juvenile bird out of the wild,” Dewey said. “You have to let it learn to accept you and train it for your intended quarry.”

Quarry refers to the food that the bird will hunt in the wild and according to Dewey, around here it is usually rabbits or squirrels but may also include mice, other birds, snakes and any other small animals.

Each apprentice falconer is limited to one bird of prey per year. Dewey has named his

bird Anubis, from the Egyptian mythologies.

Blair’s red shouldered hawk is named Medusa who was a Greek goddess, also in mythology.

“Falconry started as a way to source food,” Dewey said. “People used the birds to hunt food for the person and his family to eat. The goal was purely to gather food. Now the goal is also conservation.”

The lifespan of hawks varies a great deal.

“Seven out of ten birds will not make it to adulthood in the wild,” Dewey said.

But he also knows about falconers who have used the same raptor for twenty-five years or more.

A great deal of work goes into successful falconry.

“During hunting season, which is September 1 until February 1, I will spend two

to three hours a day with the bird,” Dewey said.

When the birds are not involved in a training exercise, they stay in a mews, which Dewey describes as an aviary.

While the bird is still in training, Dewey and Blair feed the bird a diet primarily of quail, that they have raised.

“We know what the quail have been fed,” Dewey said, “and we know that quail seems to level out the metabolism of the birds.”

Dewey’s bird has just recently recovered from a broken leg which slowed down his season, yet he continued working with the bird, building upon the relationship that is needed to be hunting companions.

“This bird is not a pet,” Dewey said. “It’s not like a pet dog that is going to be eager to see me when I get

home.”

Dewey said that at some point, he will release his bird into the wild but is not sure when that will happen.

“After it is released, it will revert back to being a wild bird with more confidence and improved hunting skills,” Dewey said.

Occasionally, birds that have been released into the wild close to home have found their way back to the falconer who trained them.

The Matneys know their hobby is unique. Several people have stopped by to learn more about their birds and many of them want to touch the birds and see them up close but they also know that birds have different personalities and not every raptor is comfortable being around a lot of different people.



Dewey Matney is training his red tailed hawk, using some quail that is behind his back to attract the hawk.



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Dewey Matney’s red tailed hawk, Anubis, rests on a post to observe his surroundings. Matney and Anubis are hunting companions.




The red-tailed hawk’s talons usually measure about 1.3 inches on an adult bird. The talons are used to catch their prey and are very sharp.

Photos by Dale Curry



A red tailed hawk’s wingspan is about three and one half feet, displaying various colors ranging from a light auburn to a dark brown. The tail is brownish red.




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