

# **AMERICAN BALD EAGLE FOUNDATION RAPTOR CENTER COLLECTION POLICY**

Formatted after IAATE Position Statement "Collection Planning" [1]

## **Alignment with the Mission Statement**

The American Bald Eagle Foundation Raptor Center's collection plan is in keeping with the ABEF mission to *"provide empowering public education that inspires stewardship of the bald eagle and other wildlife."* Collection is additionally informed by Foundation purpose statement, which requires we *"maintain a birds-first philosophy that allows the Foundation to work **ethically** and **effectively** with ambassador raptors."*

In accordance with these guidelines, all birds acquired must be able to work as ambassadors and effectively execute our mission while experiencing a high quality of life.

## **Housing**

As of the most recent review of this document, the ABEF has room for nine birds at its outdoor facility and one small bird at its indoor facility. Long term, the ABEF plans to house birds exclusively outside.

In accordance with the ABEF protocols for avian wellness, care, and handling, all future housing for avian birds must be created such that residents have ample lighting, access to a variety of views, and the choice to be exposed to or escape the elements. The aviaries must be created or modified with the specific bird in mind (species and individual needs) and created to withstand the Southeast Alaskan elements throughout the year. This includes having secondary heating sources in the winter for all birds.

Although the ABEF acknowledges the "Raptors in Captivity" [2] list of suggested enclosure sizes for different species, there may be cases in which suggested sizes can be appropriately exceeded or reduced. We recommend working with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to develop and maintain safe housing for every individual. The ABEF will not acquire a bird or whom it does not have appropriate housing.

Housing birds together requires a thorough understanding of natural social dynamics. Additionally, staff training time, husbandry requirements, and the risk of aggression or injury must be considered. At this time, conspecific housing at ABEF is strongly discouraged.

## **Requirements for New Birds**

ABEF recognizes different birds are capable of different tasks. Birds may interact with guests in a variety of contexts depending on their physical and mental condition. Some of our birds may work in flight presentations, while others are more suited to glove display, working in aviaries or weathering yards, or static display. At minimum, birds must be comfortable and confident in their space and regularly participate in voluntary weighing.

Additional criteria include:

- The species acquired must fit our educational goals. Priority should be given to native birds that add diversity to the team.

- We require significant knowledge of any bird before placement including full medical and behavioral history.
- We will acquire only near-cosmetically perfect birds for the use of our programming in keeping with Kit Lacy's 2017 paper on the subject [3].
- We will not acquire any one-eyed diurnal birds. Daytime raptors rely primarily on their eyesight to find food and navigate their enclosures.
- We will not acquire any birds with significant beak deformities. Jason Beale of Shaver's Creek writes in his Collection Plan "All animals must be able to self-engage in all aspects of natural feeding behavior – acquisition, manipulation, and consumption." [4].
- We will not acquire any birds with less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  extension of a wing due to poor balance, limited flight capabilities, and long-term quality of life problems. This requirement also precludes birds with wing amputations.
- We will not acquire any birds with fractures close to joints, due to the high chance of the birds developing arthritis young and the proceeding low quality of life.
- We will not acquire any birds who have permanent hardware (e.g. iron rods) as a result of their disability, as it often leads to high probability of arthritis as they age.
- We will not acquire any birds with significant foot disabilities (e.g. amputation of toes or talons), which result in poor balance and difficulty navigating.
- We will not acquire any birds with known neurological conditions (such as a history of seizures), due to the low quality of life and high degree of care required.
- We will not acquire any full human-imprinted hawks, falcons, or eagles without significant knowledge of their history due to potential aggression and difficulty in training/husbandry. Significant knowledge includes, at a minimum, video of the bird interacting with humans, medical history, and third party consultation.
- We will not acquire any non-imprinted adult owls into our collection without significant knowledge of their history. Significant knowledge includes, at a minimum, video of the bird interacting with humans, medical history, and third party consultation. In keeping with the suggestions in the IAATE position statement on the subject, ABEF will generally only acquire young, imprinted owls.
- We will not acquire any birds who require a warm climate to thrive such as: Harris hawks, aplomado falcons, vultures, etc.
- ABEF reserves the right to return birds to the provider within 60 days if staff does not feel a bird fits our collection policy. It is the Raptor Program Manager's job to make sure that the treatment facility is aware of this policy.

## **Financing**

Before acquiring a bird, many cost factors must be considered such as initial acquisition fees, transportation into Haines, housing creation or modification costs, ongoing maintenance costs, ongoing enrichment costs, food costs, and veterinary and medical costs. After analyzing these costs, the ABEF staff must feel financially secure enough to maintain the bird's costs for the rest of its life. Any uncertainties must be seriously considered to ascertain if this decision is best for the animal throughout the course of its life.

A 2016 cost of living analysis estimated that food, enrichment, and enclosure maintenance for each bird cost between \$1,300 and \$2,200 yearly (variable depending on size), totaling \$19,390 for the team (then 12 birds). This total does not include veterinary care or staff salary.

## **Staffing Requirements**

As a birds-first organization, the ABEF Raptor Center staff devotes much of their time to husbandry, enrichment, training, cleaning, feeding, and record keeping for our birds. The substantial employee time-cost of acquiring more birds must be considered. Common sense dictates that each employee cannot take care of more birds than 1) they have physical time in the day for and 2) their skill level accounts for. These two factors often depend on each other, as a more skilled employee is likely to be more efficient in their day-to-day tasks and the best way to learn these skills is by spending more time with the birds.

At minimum, new and existing staff must have a thorough understanding of the theory and practice of operant learning and demonstrable experience with birds of prey. Certifications including Professional Bird Trainer (International Avian Trainer Certification Board), completion of Living and Learning with Animals (Behavior Works), or comparable is highly desirable.

## **Evaluation for Current Residents**

Twice a year in the spring and fall, the Raptor Program Manager will perform a collection assessment. This includes reviewing the past six months of training, enrichment and behavioral notes, and grading each bird on their display, enrichment, trainability, disability, self-care/mobility, aviary cleaning, unique educational value, and program abilities.

Along with any veterinary assessments, the Raptor Program Manager will use the resident assessment to set goals for the birds' training and welfare. Birds with consistently low average scores will be considered for alternative placement or euthanasia to prevent prolonged suffering. These assessments can be found in each individual's record storage in the office.

## **Alternative Placement Options**

If a resident bird develops physical or behavioral problems that cannot be addressed by the existing staff, alternative options should be considered. Staff is encouraged to work within the IAATE network to determine the best placement.

## **Euthanasia**

If a bird has a consistent, low quality of life that cannot be improved by placement at another facility, then a decision should be made to euthanize the bird. It is imperative to make these considerations as objectively as possible, without emotion clouding judgement. Staff is highly encouraged to consult with others outside the organization if this is not possible.

Before the decision to euthanize is made, all other options must be exhausted. This includes, but is not limited to training, enrichment, husbandry, alternative placement, veterinary care, alternative housing or perching, etc.

Euthanasia should be considered for birds who show:

- Extreme aversions to people regardless of relationship building, positive reinforcement training and enrichment. Birds may also exhibit self-injurious behaviors such as flying into windows or walls on a regular basis, plucking feathers, or lack of self-care.
- Continuous injuries regardless of treatment.
- Consistent problems with mobility, especially that which might cause uncontrolled falls and an inability to right themselves.
- Extreme aggression or extreme apathy that poses a threat to welfare.

Staff is strongly encouraged, in all cases, to discuss options with USFWS and other professionals in the field.

## **Compliance with Permitting**

Yearly reports must be submitted to both USFWS and ADFG. All permits must be kept up to date with physical and digital copies readily available. All activities undertaken with the birds at ABEF must be in keeping with regulations set forth by these agencies. It is the duty of the Raptor Program Manager to be familiar with these regulations and up to date with permit reporting.

## **Bibliography**

1. "Position Statement: Collection Planning." International Association of Avian Trainers & Educators, July 2011. Web. Oct. 2016.
2. Arent, Lori. Raptors in Captivity: Guidelines for Care and Management. Surrey, B.C.: Hancock House, 2007. Print.
3. Lacy, Kit. "Assessment of non-releasable raptors." 2017
4. Beale, Jason A. "Shaver's Creek Environmental Center Collection Plan." 2018.