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'Traveling Talons'

Birds of Prey Educational Program
New Feature of Busch Gardens Bird Show



AWESOME EAGLE — Visitors to Busch Gardens, The Dark Continent, in Tampa, Florida, get a close-up look at "raptors" — endangered and threatened birds of prey, such as hawks, owls, eagles and falcons — during the park's famed Bird Show. Audience members learn about the plight of various birds of prey, their behaviors and conservation efforts being undertaken to protect raptors.

TAMPA, Fla., March 31, 1987 — New vistas in the fascinating world of birds have opened up for visitors at Tampa's Busch Gardens, The Dark Continent, where an educational presentation on "raptors" — endangered and threatened birds of prey such as hawks, owls, eagles and falcons — has been added to the park's famed Bird Show.

The new raptor presentation, which debuted at Busch Gardens in February, is the result of a cooperative effort between Busch Gardens and the Raptor Rehabilitation and Propagation Project, Inc. (RRPP), a group dedicated to the preservation of birds of prey.

Based in Eureka, Missouri, which is near St. Louis, RRPP is sanctioned to conduct breeding programs for, studies of, and rehabilitation of birds of prey which have been injured in the wild.

"We have always been concerned about the conservation and propagation of endangered species," said Joseph C. Fincher, general manager of Busch Gardens. "The public also shares a curi-

osity about the history, behaviors and habitats of these animals. One of our top priorities at Busch Gardens is conservation of wildlife and we are pleased to be able to help spread the RRPP's environmental education message.

"Anheuser-Busch has provided corporate support to the St. Louis area-based RRPP for almost 10 years. But our commitment to raptor preservation goes back many more years," said Fincher. "One species of raptor in particular, the American bald eagle, has long been an integral part of the Anheuser-Busch corporate logo, symbolizing strength, pride and quality."

According to Robert J. Garner, manager of animal training for Busch Gardens, the RRPP's "Traveling Talons" educational program now accounts for the entire second half of Busch Gardens' 25-minute Bird Show. Presented to park visitors six times daily, the "Traveling Talons" educational message will reach nearly a quarter million park visitors during 1987.

In the Busch Gardens Bird Show,

audience members learn about the plight of various birds of prey, their behaviors and conservation efforts being undertaken to protect raptors.

"Birds of prey are heavily persecuted in the wild and man's encroachment has threatened or entirely eliminated many species of raptors," Garner said. "In many cases, species have been pushed to the brink of extinction through human ignorance and arrogance."

Even though federal and state laws prohibit the taking, possessing or killing of raptors, it is estimated that between 60 percent and 85 percent of all raptors hatched in 1987 will die before their first birthday.

The birds of prey portion of Busch Gardens' Bird Show begins with two of Busch Gardens' black vultures performing a dramatic free-flight demonstration over the audience. Then, one of the vultures flies toward the crowd, to alight on the gloved arm of an audience volunteer and back to the bird trainer onstage.

Raptors which are featured in the presentation include a Harris hawk, kestrel, barn owl, great horned owl, peregrine falcon, black hawk, red-tailed hawk and bald eagle. A golden eagle from Busch Gardens is also featured in the show.

Most of these birds have been hand-raised and are accustomed to contact with humans, Garner said. And, except for the peregrine falcon and the great horned owl, both of which are unable to fly because of injuries they sustained in the wild, all of the raptors perform free-flight demonstrations during the show.

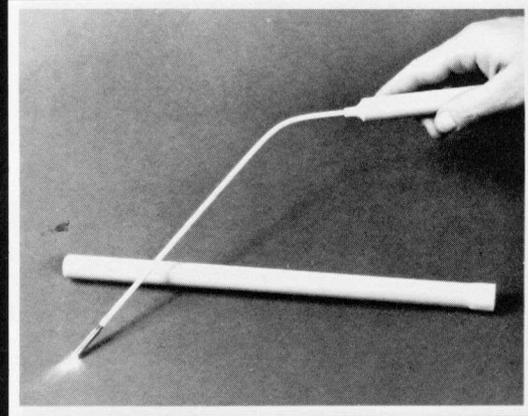
Following the show, visitors can learn more about the raptors and take close-up photos during an informal question-and-answer session with RRPP and Busch Gardens staff members.

As part of Busch Gardens' educational effort, park visitors who see the Bird Show receive step-by-step instructions on how to build nest boxes for barn owls and kestrels.

With a collection of more than 3,300 animals representing more than 300 different species, Busch Gardens ranks as one of the top zoos in the United States. The park is nationally known for its breeding and endangered species programs and its innovations in designing animal habitats representative of their natural homes in the wild.

Busch Gardens, The Dark Continent, is a 300-acre African-themed family entertainment park located at 3000 Busch Blvd. in Tampa, Florida. ●

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