

Harris hawks; a real family affair

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by Marguerite Lanham

The Harris hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) is a large dark brown-bird with reddish-brown patches on thighs and shoulders. The average wing span is 43 inches. The hawk feeds on small birds, rodents and reptiles.

In Arizona, it can be found in saguaro-palo verde desert from

building a nest in the top of a nearby saguaro.

The nest, consisting of small branches, twigs and weeds, was 3 feet in diameter and surprisingly deep. Little of the brooding female could be seen above the rim. In about 35 or 40 days, two fuzzy, goggle-eyed hatchlings could be glimpsed from time to

couraging cries, gradually coaxing the young birds into flight. Soon they were flapping and soaring with ease.

Landing, however, was a different matter. Due to the "togetherness" of the nest, the fledglings tried to share the same saguaro top for a landing field. The first bird to land was crowded off by the second bird. Sometimes one lit on top of the other.

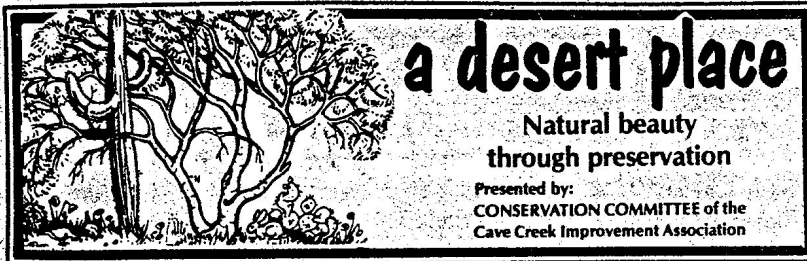
By early June, all five birds were hunting together. One morning, a fledgling was left behind. It spent the day on a saguaro top crying plaintively, unwilling or unable to hunt on its own.

The nest was now abandoned and the hawks roosted on adjacent saguaros.

One evening, only four saguaro tops were occupied. The young adult was conspicuously absent. Whether it met with an accident, was driven off by the parent hawks, or had left the family group by choice, is only conjecture. So far, it has not returned.

It will be interesting to see if the parent hawks return to the same nest next spring, and if they will bring this year's young with them.

All birds of prey are protected in Arizona. If you observe any violations of game laws, please report them. Call Help our Wildlife hotline toll free at 1-800-352-0700.



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north of Phoenix to the Tucson area. Its cry is a harsh "karr," while the young give a plaintive "kreee."

In 1837, Audubon painted this hawk, naming it for Edward Harris, a friend and benefactor.

Last fall, our television antenna became a favorite perch for a mating pair of Harris hawks with a half-grown offspring in tow. They were completely indifferent to our activities, ignoring slammed doors, loud voices and being studied through binoculars.

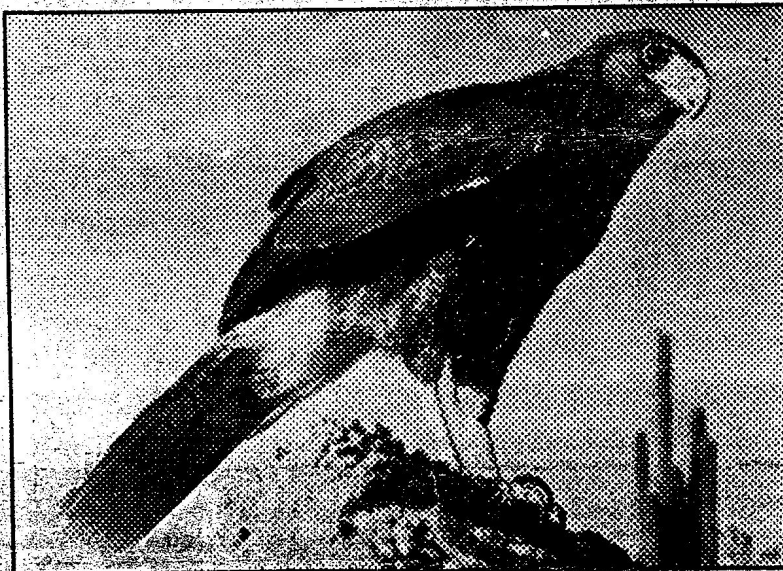
After the antenna collapsed under their combined weight, they moved to a nearby ironwood tree. Here they stayed through the winter and in March began

time.

By now, last year's fledgling was indiscernible from the mating male. The female, being larger, was easily recognizable. All three adults hunted for the two hungry hatchlings. The food they brought was mostly rodents, with some birds. I saw one hawk snatch a bird from a saguaro top as it fed on open seed pods.

The young birds soon grew dark feathers and spent much time hopping from the nest to the tops of the saguaro arms. Learning to fly was a Laurel and Hardy comedy act with much wing flapping, false starts and crash landings.

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