

LIGHTHAWK

WAYPOINT

SUCCESS STORIES FROM ABOVE

August 2009, Issue 32

LightHawk's monthly update, WayPoint, was created to highlight the impact of our work. Each edition covers one specific flight, or series of flights, and illustrates how LightHawk advances conservation efforts throughout North and Central America through the unique perspective of flight. We hope you enjoy WayPoint and will share with others our success stories from above.

Young Aplomado Falcons Soar with LightHawk



These month-old Aplomado Falcon chicks made their way from Boise to Albuquerque aboard Volunteer Pilot Jeff Hamilton's TBM 700 and eventually were released in Socorro, New Mexico. *Photo: Jeff Hamilton/LightHawk*



The falcons traveled two or three to an 18-inch cardboard box loaded into at TBM 700. The falcons' inflight accommodations included a bed of straw and some frozen quail to munch on along the way. The Peregrine Fund's Bill Heinrich is shown with Martha Hamilton prior to loading the first falcon passengers of the season. *Photo: Jeff Hamilton/LightHawk*

Most LightHawk missions don't take place at a cruising altitude of 30,000 feet, but four flights this summer involved longer distances, higher speeds and wilder passengers than normal. Working with longtime LightHawk partner The Peregrine Fund (TPF), five LightHawk volunteer pilots transported 61 young Aplomado Falcons from Boise, Idaho to release locations in southern New Mexico and west Texas. This effort was made possible by the incredible generosity of two LightHawk board members and three brand new volunteer pilots, all willing to share their time and turn their aircraft into wildlife transport vehicles to lend a hand with the restoration effort.

The Aplomado Falcon was once a common sight in the Southwest, but in the mid-1950s habitat destruction restricted the species to Mexico. In the 1990s, The Peregrine Fund (TPF) embarked on a species restoration effort in collaboration with public land managers like the US Fish and Wildlife Service and a collection of private landowners. This effort to restore the species was successful in southern Texas, and since 2000, the coalition has worked to re-establish populations in west Texas and southern New Mexico. The ultimate goal of the project is to rebuild self-sustaining wild populations over the next several years so that the species can be removed from the Endangered Species Act.

At their World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho, TPF has established a successful breeding program using strict conditions that result in superior quality birds for release. This careful breeding improves the falcons' chance of survival in the wild and leads to robust genetic characteristics in the newly established wild populations. The difficult part is transporting the young birds from Boise to release sites in the Southwest. According to TPF's Bill Heinrich, "The relocation from Boise to Texas or New Mexico can be stressful on the young falcons, which is why every effort is made to reduce their time in transition." Because speed is of the essence when it comes to transporting the young falcons, flight is the perfect mode of transportation. Compared to a 48-hour drive, the four-hour flight with



Like its famous Peregrine Falcon and Merlin cousins, the northern Aplomado Falcon is a fast, nimble bird known for thrilling aerial displays and an ability to chase larger raptors away from nest sites. Aplomados eat grassland birds and insects and can live up to twenty years in captivity. Photo by Bill Heinrich/The Peregrine Fund.



Land owners Cindy and AT Cole watch TPF biologist Angel Montoya handle a chick prior to release on the Cole's Pitchfork Ranch near Deming, New Mexico. Photo: Alicia Arcidiacono

LightHawk enables the birds to arrive at the release sites in excellent condition, which greatly increases their likelihood of survival in the wild.

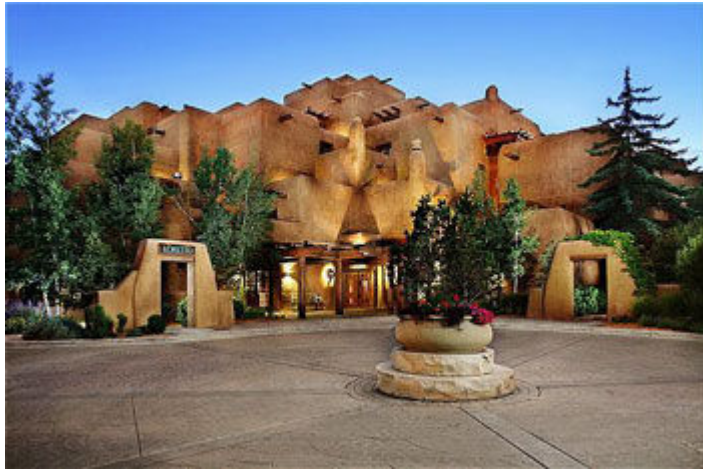
TPF's international headquarters and breeding facility are just ten minutes from Boise's Gowen Field. Four times this summer TPF biologists met LightHawk volunteer pilots with planeloads of cardboard boxes, each box holding two or three one month-old falcon chicks. LightHawk board member and Volunteer Pilot Jeff Hamilton kicked off the falcon transport season in mid-June, by flying ten chicks to Albuquerque in his Socata TBM 700. About a week later, Andy Dunigan, a brand-new Volunteer Pilot flying his first LightHawk mission, flew nine chicks to Marfa, TX in his TBM 850. The largest load, and longest day, happened in early July when board member and Volunteer Pilot Brent Blue flew 31 young birds to two release locations – Deming, NM and Marfa, TX – in his Cessna 340. New to the LightHawk Volunteer Pilot Corps, Randy Luskey and Zachary Huston jointly flew their first LightHawk mission, completing this summer's effort by flying 11 falcons to Marfa, TX at the end of July in Randy's TBM 850.

Following the last flight, Angel Montoya, a TPF wildlife biologist based in New Mexico said, "The LightHawk pilots were all great and we really appreciate their time and generosity in getting the falcons to the release sites in a timely manner. Getting the falcons to the release sites healthy is a big part of making the project a success." From the pilot's perspective, Zach Huston said, "The flight was great. Everything went as planned and the chicks were amazing to see. Their boxes looked like jumping beans. Thanks for the opportunity to help."

LightHawk is dedicated to making a difference in environmental protection efforts by working in partnership with groups like The Peregrine Fund. Whether flying a partner over a program area in a Cessna 182, or soaring a thousand miles in a fast turboprop to deliver baby falcons to release sites, the efforts of LightHawk's staff, board, and volunteer pilots empower our conservation partners and serve as a powerful catalyst for conservation success.

Visit www.lighthawk.org/aplomadofalcons.htm for more photos of the falcon flights, as well as video of the flights and subsequent releases of the young birds to the wild.

"Arriving at the release sites as soon as possible is critical for the falcons overall well being and health. In past years when falcons were transported by vehicle, they often suffered feather damage and delays in their natural feeding schedules. Having the LightHawk flight support ensures the health of the falcons by relieving stress. Birds that are in excellent condition when transferred to the Hack Box for release are more likely to survive to independence to bolster and enhance the wild population." -- Bill Heinrich, Species Restoration Manager, The Peregrine Fund



Celebrate 30 Years **On the Wings of LightHawk**

Come join us where it all started 30 years ago and meet an adventurer who traveled the entire length of the Colorado River by kayak and local experts who will illuminate what's at stake in this part of the West and how LightHawk missions make a difference. You'll also hear stories about the early days of LightHawk and a plane named, "Emily," reconnect with fellow flyers and enjoy the beauty of Santa Fe, New Mexico a city celebrating its 400th anniversary.

October 9-11, 2009. Santa Fe, New Mexico

Join us at the renowned Inn and Spa at Loretto, our home base for the Fly-in.

~Call Bev at 207-699-4145 or email bgabe@lighthawk.org to reserve your spot today.~

Reserve your hotel room by September 1st to take advantage of the LightHawk rate. (www.innatloretto.com)

About LightHawk

What started in 1979 with one man and a vision has grown to almost 150 volunteer pilots flying missions across the U.S., into Canada, through Mexico and down to Panama. Today, LightHawk is the oldest and largest nonprofit, volunteer pilot-based organization flying environmental missions in collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations.

At LightHawk we believe the view from the window of a small airplane provides a powerful and effective platform for research, groundtruthing, environmental awareness, and education.

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