



BIRDS

High Flyers

Volunteer pilots are helping bring back endangered falcons. By Daniel Glick

This is the first actual flight for these birds," says pilot Randy Luskey, taxiing down a runway in Boise, Idaho, to deliver 11 captive-bred aplomado falcon chicks to West Texas. Luskey is volunteering his time and plane to whisk these endangered birds 1,000 miles from the Peregrine Fund's captive-breeding site in Boise to their new home. These 35-day-old chicks are still a week from fledging, and they're hitching a ride on Luskey's speedy single-engine turboprop to avoid a grueling two-day car ride.

"It's great to have a mission, to use the plane for something other than your own enjoyment and purposes," says Luskey, a member of LightHawk, a 30-year-old nonprofit

of volunteer pilots working to "champion environmental protection through the unique perspective of flight."

Photos taken from the thousands of LightHawk flights have helped create British Columbia's "Great Bear Rainforest" agreement, stop a giant gold mine bordering Yellowstone, and support many projects in the sweeping 2009 wilderness bill that protected more than two million acres nationwide. In any given year some 175 pilots can be called on to donate their time, aircraft, and fuel to help scientists collect field data, journalists cover challenging stories, and conservation groups gather pictures that are worth a thousand words for presentations to lawmakers. "They bring expertise above and beyond being great pilots," says filmmaker Jonathan Waterman, who has flown extensively with LightHawk to support Colorado River conservation with the National Geographic Society. He says the pilots know the landscapes, topography, and natural history, and have an encyclopedic knowledge of obscure landing strips. "These guys are pros."

Today's flight might be a key turning point in the recovery of North America's rarest falcon because commercial airlines balk at carrying the chicks and trucking can damage pre-fledglings' feathers. With about 50 reintroduced pairs settled in Texas and New Mexico, this infusion of chicks will almost hit the original target of 60. Bill Heinrich, the Peregrine Fund's species restoration manager, hopes that reaching that goal would spur



NUMBERS GAME

235 The population, in millions, of egg-laying birds in the U.S.

50 Number of times per day a hen turns over an egg so the yolk won't stick to the shell's sides

26 Hours it takes a hen to produce an egg

17,000 The number of pores on an egg's surface, through which the egg absorbs smells

13 The number of essential nutrients in one egg, including protein, iron, and zinc

0.00125 The weight, in pounds, of a ruby-throated hummingbird's egg

18 The weight, in pounds, of the heaviest egg ever recorded, which was laid by the extinct elephant bird

19 Average clutch size of gray partridge, the largest of any bird

1,633 The price, in dollars, paid for a fossilized elephant bird egg

5.6 The price, in millions, of the most expensive Fabergé egg ever sold, in 1994

downlisting or delisting the falcon within a few years.

After landing in Marfa, Texas, Peregrine Fund biologist Brian Mutch opens U-Haul boxes to reveal straw-covered cardboard nests with cheeping

chicks surrounded by eviscerated quail bits, and Luskey cradles one of his feathered cargo. On the return flight, his enthusiasm bubbles through the headset. "I got to hold one, and that made it all worth it."



The Greenest Profession To battle the economic blues, one brothel in Berlin, Germany's red-light district is going green. The house, run by Regina and Thomas Goetz, now offers a five-euro discount—about \$7—to any client who arrives via bike or public transport and can prove it with a helmet, lock, or valid ticket. The move was both eco- and financially driven, an attempt to boost business in an industry hit hard by a faltering world economy. The incentive seems to be doing the trick; it's bringing in three to five new clients daily, Thomas told Reuters, and decreasing traffic congestion in the area.—Michele Wilson