

# The Hammerstroms- Two People For The Birds

Bob Lattin

For many years, the American people have been doing their best to prove that this country is not for the birds. We have shot birds, poisoned birds, trapped birds, sterilized birds with DDT, and badgered birds with airplanes. We have wiped out whole species to make pretty hats, and tried our best to change the national emblem from that of an eagle to that of a parking lot. There are, however, a few diehards who continue to aid and abet our avian enemies. The Pointer sought out two such recalcitrants and traveled to their Plainfield home last week to talk to them.

Frederick and Frances Hammerstrom are two Wildlife Biologists who live in a large, old farmhouse west of Plainfield which they aptly call their 'Eagle Rehabilitation Center'. For over twenty years this husband and wife team have, among other things, made their home a hospital for injured Eagles, hawks and owls. Frederick Hammerstrom has been, for many years, the leader in the fight to save the Prairie Chicken from extinction in the Buena Vista marsh south of Stevens Point, and both he and his wife have become known as authorities on prairie Chickens and birds of prey. Mrs. Hammerstrom has written a number of books, one of which, entitled *An Eagle To The Sky*, deals with her experiences with two of the many eagles she has cared for. The two people are on the board of directors of the Citizens Natural Resources Association and worked, until recently, for the Department of Natural Resources as Wildlife biologists.

Mrs. Hammerstrom stated that she has been caring for

eagles for over 25 years, and that most of the birds were sent to her from wardens and friends after being shot or caught in traps. Though the eagles are, perhaps, the most well known of her guests, Mrs. Hammerstrom also had, at the time of this interview, a young barred owl on her side porch, a red tailed hawk behind the house, and a great horned owl roaming around the place somewhere. Mrs. Hammerstrom emphasized that, though she releases the birds eventually, they must be kept around the house for a while after they are able to fly.

"A lot of people have the mistaken idea," she stated, "that if a bird can fly, then it ought to be let go right away; which is about as silly as saying that a man who has been hospitalized and is finally able to walk should be able to work on a construction job. Its got to be gradual, but people don't realize that, they think 'oh, it can fly, its all right, everything is fine'. Thats just not so."

Mrs. Hammerstrom was asked what she thought was the greatest danger to rare birds of prey in our country. She stated that DDT, removal of habitat, and the population explosion were the major factors responsible for the decline in bird populations, though the population explosion was "... in the long run, the most dangerous of any of these."

Mrs. Hammerstrom and her husband are, as was previously mentioned, on the board of directors of the Citizens Natural Resources Association, a conservation group which was instrumental in the banning of the use of DDT from Wisconsin, and which fought and is fighting against the use of Antimycin to

poison carp filled streams.

Mrs. Hammerstrom felt that the group was, perhaps, one of the most effective of its kind in the United States, and emphasized the need for more young members. When asked what effect the group has had on state programs, Mrs. Hammerstrom stated that, "I think we have had some effect in having more of the game interests considered by the foresters. Many of them feel that anywhere a tree could grow a tree should grow, and much of the forestry has been monotype tree planting. Whenever there's a fire, right away the tree planting machines go in. Fire is a natural thing, it is needed to set back plant succession. You see, Smokey Bear is a terrible thing, all the little children think he's so wonderful, they get brainwashed to think that all fire is awful. We must have fire to create prairies, to have habitats for things like the Sharptail Grouse and the prairie Chicken. A tree plantation is really no more conservation than a corn field is, its main purpose is to make money. You ask a little child what conservation is and he's apt to say 'planting trees', but if one plants trees in the wrong places, you see, its the opposite of conservation."

Mrs. Hammerstrom was asked what could be done to revitalize the ecology movement, and what dangers there were in the way the movement is proceeding at the present time. She stated that the first thing to be done would be to "...jump on those people who are working in the ecological movement trying to preserve this and that, who are going off the deep end and writing to their Senators

without doing their homework.

They are very darn dangerous, they stir up a hornets nest of controversy because they don't do solid research. I talk with a good number of conservation groups and, oh, some of them have the zaniest ideas. Actually, the whole problem with the ecological movement today is one of immaturity. You see, almost every child realizes that saving an individual animal and keeping it from suffering is the right and proper thing to do. They don't mind if whole races are wiped out, however. If there were a little Vietnamese kid run over on the street out here, everyone would be rushing to help it. Yet, we go ahead and we cause misery to how many of them. We just aren't grown up enough, I guess, to carry our imaginations far enough to save us. We live so incapsulated, like children. A number of the ecologists I know, speaking of American businessmen, have said, 'why, they're just children, they're ethic is that of a little child'. They're so right."

Mr. Hammerstrom is known primarily for his work with the Prairie Chicken, a large grouse that is rapidly becoming extinct in other parts of the country. Hammerstrom stated that the outlook for the chicken, at this time, is perhaps, the best in the entire country. Through his efforts, and through the efforts of Ray Anderson, a professor in the Natural Resources Department at UW-SP, the Prairie Chicken flock in the Buena Vista marsh, the Mead Wildlife area, and in the Fogerty marsh west of Stevens Point is on the increase. Mr. Hammerstrom credited this success, in a large part, to the effort of concerned citizens who

have purchased land in the Buena Vista and Fogerty marshes to be set aside as Prairie Chicken preserves.

"You can talk conservation of, say, the sharptail sparrow for example," he stated, "and some of the dedicated Audubon types will travel hundreds of miles to get this bird on their lifetime lists. But, they are small, and hard to recognize. For most people, this is just a little brown bird which they are never going to see and couldn't care less about.

We try to do something for this little brown bird, and the people listen very intently and say 'yup-yup yup-yup, something ought to be done', but they just let it ride. But, the people who have come here to watch the chickens, are awakened at half past two, in the dark and the whole thing is an adventure to start with. Well, those birds themselves are their own best salesmen. The people come back in and they're just popeyed, 'boy we've got to do something!', they say, and its all the difference in the world. Its those people, to a very large degree, who put up the money."

The Pointer, after the interview with Mr. Hammerstrom, was taken on a tour of the Eagle Rehabilitation Center, and met Chrys and Grendel, the male and female Golden eagles the Hammerstroms are playing host to at the moment. Mrs. Hammerstrom has had success in breeding eaglets by artificial insemination, and the female eagle has accepted her as a mate, after rejecting Grendel, the male eagle. The whole story of the Hammerstrom's and their eagles is described in Mrs. Hammerstrom's book *An Eagle to the Sky*.



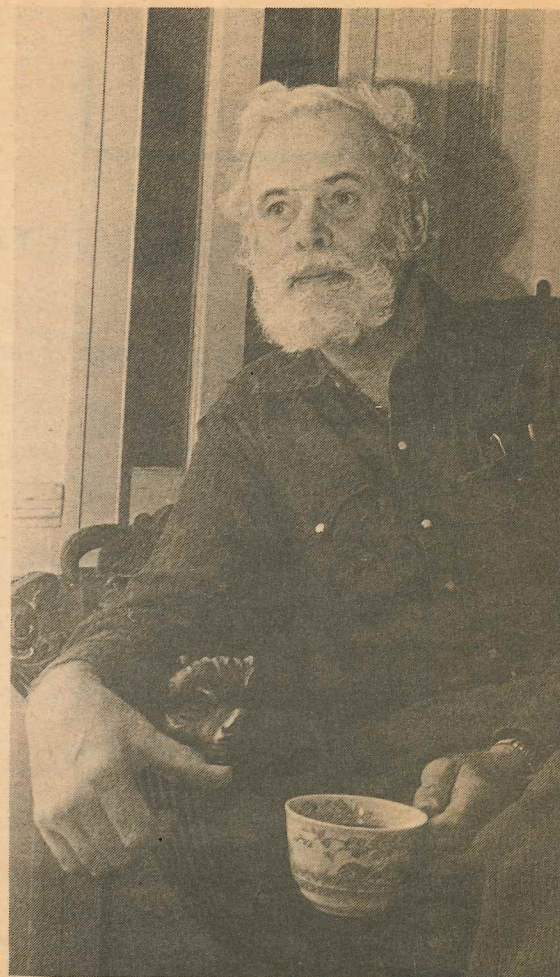
The Hammerstrom's Home, and 'Eagle Rehabilitation Center'



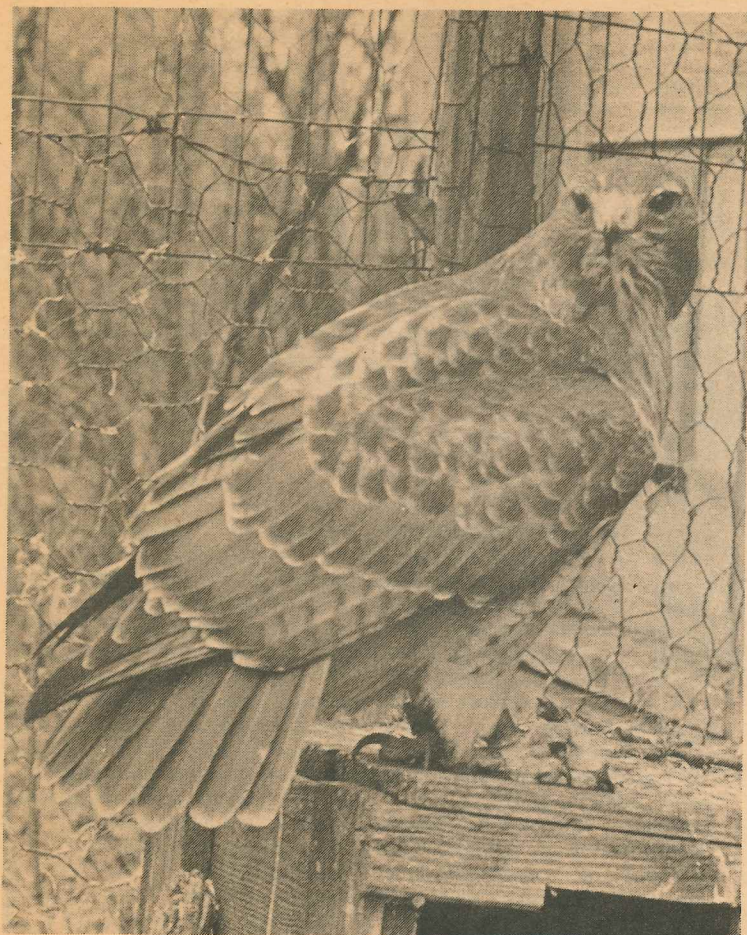
Frances Hammerstrom - "Many of the ecologists I know, when speaking of American businessmen, say 'Why, they're just like children, they're ethic is that of a little child. They are so right!'"



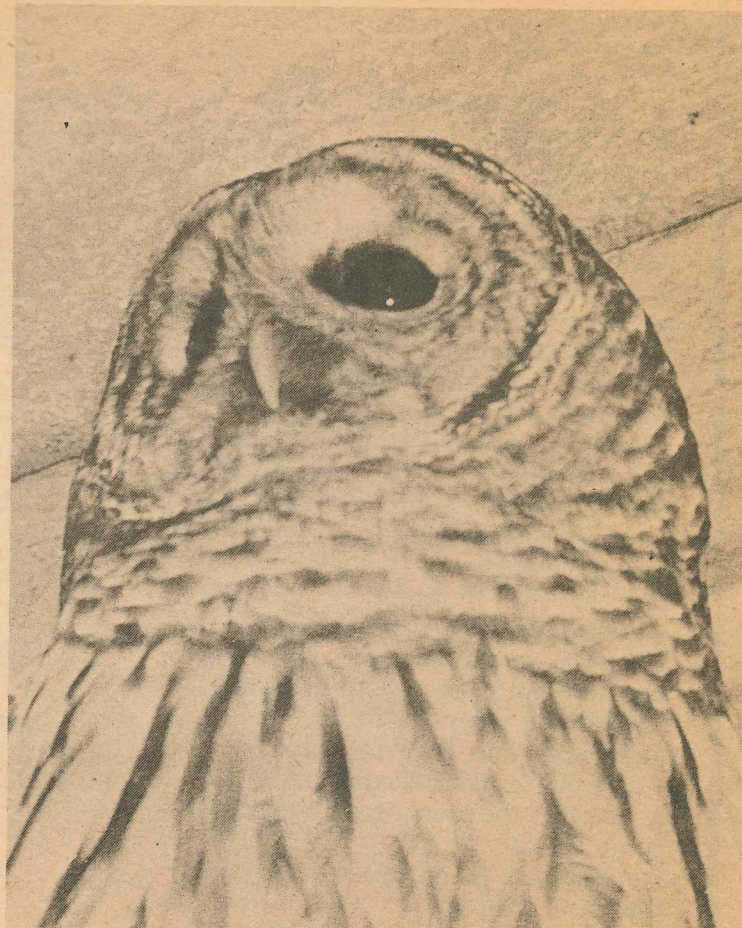
Grendel, the Hammerstrom's male eagle, has fathered an eaglet through artificial insemination.



Fredrick Hammerstrom - "The greatest threat to all wildlife, and in fact the world we live in, is human overpopulation."



"The red tailed hawk was orphaned and given to us by a game warden."



Barred Owl - "This is a young barred owl. He was turned over to us because he was said to be attacking a young boy, which seems like a lot of rot."