

Irate hawk descends and attacks gardener

By Robert Downes
Staff writer

A red-tailed hawk, which believed that its nesting territory was being violated, dive-bombed a gardener last week at a Bloomfield Hills home, striking him on the head with its talons.

The aerial attack resulted in three puncture wounds in the man's head, said Bloomfield Township naturalist Jonathan Schechter. The gardener decided against seeking hospital treatment, but he now wears a plastic band hat in the backyard of the home on Vaughan Road near Cranbrook. Presumably, he also keeps an eye on the big spruce tree where the hawk has built its nest.

Employed by the Cranbrook Institute of Science, Schechter was called by city police to assist in dealing with the bird.

"We had an adult hawk do something which is unprecedented," he said, "which is hitting someone on the head." He speculated that the mother hawk felt that it was protecting the three offspring it has in its nest, an instinctive reaction.

It is believed that the hawk is the same bird which attacked another worker on the property last year, tearing his shirt.

"The hawk was not acting aggressive. It's just that this hawk had established a territory and felt that there was a human intruder," Schechter said.

Schechter spent several days last week assisting special agent Len Schuman of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in attempting to trap the bird. He noted that under the amended Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1972, it is against the law to entrap or kill birds such as hawks and owls. Problem birds are dealt with, however, through the U.S. Animal Damage Control program, which is where special agent Schuman comes in.

The territory which the red-tail has claimed as its own is ideal for the bird's hunting purposes, Schechter said. The back lawn area is an area of approximately two acres provides the squirrels which the hawk seeks as prey.

He commented that birds such as the red-tailed hawk are generally felt to be beneficial predators in that they prey on rodents. One pair was recently documented as feeding on rats from a sewer culvert in Pontiac.

"They're quite common all through Michigan," he said. "They're creatures of opportunity."

He noted that the average red-tailed hawk has a head-to-tail span of 18 inches, with a wingspan of 48 inches. Its hunting area is generally a half-mile square.

THE ATTEMPT to trap the mother and her young was abandoned Friday after Schuman and Schechter decided to wait a week or so to see if nature would take its course and prompt the birds to fly away on their own. Schechter said that the young hawks are quite large, but are not yet ready to fend for themselves. Removing the mother at this time could result in an even greater nuisance from the bewildered offspring.

The trapping procedure which was tried without success, involved the use of Bat Chatri predator traps, which are illegal for general use.

Schechter said that the traps work by placing a live rodent in a wire basket at the center of a mesh of fine filament nooses. When the hawk plunges in to seize its prey, its talons become entangled in the mesh.

He noted that the traps' use is best left to the experts. "Besides being illegal, you could get quite hurt, because a trapped hawk is very powerful."

TWO OF THE TRAPS were baited Thursday, but except for a near-miss by one of the offspring, the hawks stayed away. The hamster brought in by the U.S. government is reportedly breathing easier now that the attempt has been abandoned. Two white mice were also used, courtesy of the Tropical Fish Pond in Royal Oak.

The hawks will be observed for the next week, and if they continue to be a problem, another attempt will be made to remove them. Once the hawks fly off, they will follow their migratory instincts, Schechter said. He noted that there are a number of variables involved, but it is possible that the mother and its young could return to the same area the following year.

If the mother hawk turns up next year, an attempt could be made to catch it before it builds its nest. Transporting the hawk to an isolated area could encourage it to build its nest elsewhere. As a last resort, a U.S. agent could be dispatched to shoot the bird, if it continues to attack people.

Persons who encounter a hawk's nest would do well to avoid it, he said. "If someone actually found a hawk's nest and climbed up to it, they would be severely attacked."

Hills filing deadline nears

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quired to narrow the field to eight or fewer candidates. If a primary election is needed, it will be in September.

City Clerk Floyd Cairns said he will strictly adhere to the 4 p.m. deadline for turning in nominating petitions. In 1979, Cairns was forced to invalidate two candidates' petitions because they were turned in just minutes past the deadline.

A CITY Council candidate must be a Farmington Hills resident and registered voter although

length of residency is not specified.

Nominating petitions must contain at least 115 qualified signatures but not more than 129. Anyone signing a candidate's nominating petition must be a Farmington Hills resident and registered voter.

The top three vote getters in the November election will serve four-year terms while the fourth winner will serve the two-year term.

Council members earn \$150 a month for attending at least the two regular monthly meetings as well as any other special meetings. The mayor, however, earns \$225 for the same number of meetings.

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