



# 2024 Conference Speakers and Workshops

## PAPER PRESENTATIONS

(In order of presentation)

### **Antecedent Arrangement is EVERYTHING!**

***Nicky Plaskitt BSc (hons) CPBT-KA CPAT-KA, Director, Shaping Behaviour***  
(60-minutes)

In my current role as a consultant, I am fortunate to work with many collections, and therefore a huge range of experience levels, all with the same question – ‘how can we do better for our animals?’ As such, when I am working with experienced trainers, I feel very comfortable setting them training plans with multiple steps and points to evaluate, however when working with those less experienced, or on a time crunch, I need to find an alternate way for them to be successful. For me, a successful animal is one that can access reinforcers quickly during a training session and can make choices to access those reinforcers – it’s the same for the people I am training. Antecedent arrangement is at the heart of this – how can I make it as easy as possible for the learner to do the behavior I want to see? With overstretched and understaffed people, the first step can sometimes be as simple as asking them to change the area they feed their learner in. This technique uses

reinforcement as communication across species and helps build relationships where learners feel safe to ask questions and try new things.

**Presenter Bio:** Nicky has worked in the field of animal care since 2000, spending many years working with birds and other animals as a zookeeper, animal trainer, presenter, and team leader. In her last UK zoo position she took steps to revolutionize the care and management of a large number of free flight birds under her care using science based positive reinforcement training. In 2021 Nicky set up her own business and now works as a Zoological Behaviour Consultant across the UK and overseas for Shaping Behaviour. The goal of the business is to improve animal welfare by empowering animal caregivers with knowledge to boost their skills. Nicky is passionate about helping animals and their humans achieve their goals using the most positive methods. Nicky has been a member of IAATE since 2012 and on the International and Conservation Committees since then. She joined the Board of Directors in 2022, taking part in writing our recent Position Statements. She is a Certified Professional Bird Trainer and Animal Trainer through the IATCB and sits on their Board of Directors also.

## **Keep Your Eyes Turned Skyward: Training a Reliable Soaring Behavior**

***Alexandra Goguen, The Raptors***

**(30-minutes)**

Many birds soar in their natural environment, particularly raptor species that have broad wings designed to catch updrafts and thermals. When working with these raptors, there are many benefits to training a soaring behavior. We can reduce the risk of fly-offs by building up a bird's confidence and its learned history of returning to the handler from a soar in different environmental conditions. By giving birds the opportunity to engage in more enriching training sessions, we can increase their overall welfare and integrate soaring behavior into free-flight programs to create more dynamic demonstrations. Finally, soaring trained raptors can be an extremely effective technique employed as part of a wildlife management program, specifically in deterring target species from feeding and resting in areas such as urban rooftops, landfills, airports, and industrial sites. Through shaping and careful antecedent arrangement, we can successfully and reliably train a soaring behavior in several hawk and eagle species. In this paper, I will discuss the step-by-step of shaping a soaring behavior with positive reinforcement, focusing on Harris's Hawks, Red-Tailed Hawks, and Bald Eagles.

**Presenter Bio:** Alexandra Goguen has loved animals since she was a child, and knew she always wanted a career working closely with animals. In 2015 Alexandra got to make her dream a reality by working with the incredible birds (and humans!) at Pacific Northwest Raptors (The Raptors) located on Vancouver Island, BC, Canada. Starting out as a volunteer at The Raptors visitor center and being hired shortly after, Alexandra was dedicated to continuously bettering herself by learning as much about the training, husbandry, and welfare of birds of prey as she could. This dedication and passion led to Alexandra moving up throughout The Raptors, and she is now part of the management team; in particular, specializing in training birds and humans alike! Alexandra loves the multifaceted approach of The Raptors, giving rise to opportunities to train and free-fly birds in a variety of environments, including one of her main passions, wildlife management.

## **Quality of Life Assessments: An Evolution of Personal Understanding and Professional Forms**

***Beth Thompson, Education Coordinator/Trainer, New Mexico Wildlife Center***

**(30-minutes)**

As raptor center culture has been changing from a culture of caretaking to one of connection and conservation, many trainers are expanding their definition of welfare from physiological needs, veterinary care, and safety needs to also include social needs, mental stimulation, and choice (Fennell and Campbell, 2023). Regularly completing Quality of Life (QOL) assessments can be a very powerful tool to better evaluate the ambassador animals' welfare and monitor changes over time. Additionally, including a quantitative portion in the assessment can help to make euthanasia decisions more objective. At the 2023 IAATE Conference there was a lot of interest in QOL assessments during the Q&A portion of the Euthanasia presentation by Jessica Torres; this paper and presentation will share some of my personal journey to better understanding ambassador animal welfare and discuss New Mexico Wildlife Center's recent revamping of our previous QOL form to better suit our team's situation and values. The goal is to provide a framework for other organizations to create their own form and begin or continue to make their own regular QOL assessments.

**Presenter Bio:** Beth Thompson has been interested in raptors since seeing falconry demonstrations at an early age and has taken a winding path through a variety of environmental education positions to work with these ambassadors. She began with internships to learn to care for and handle birds of prey, then spent five years learning about choice-based training from some of the best teachers: a small collection of hawks and owls. She was also able to virtually attend the Care and Management of Captive Raptors Workshop from the University of Minnesota Raptor Center in 2020. She now works at the New Mexico Wildlife Center with a larger collection of raptors and other ambassadors, has been an IAATE member since 2023, and learned a lot during the 2023 IAATE Conference.

## **Neotribalism in Avian Training and Education**

***Stephanie Ashley, The Peregrine Fund***

**(30 minutes)**

"Neotribalism" is a sociological term which describes the tendency of people in the modern world to form groups, or "tribes", with other like-minded individuals. It's a cultural phenomenon that can be beneficial by offering a safe community to share ideas and experiences. IAATE is one example of a tribe. But tribes can be harmful if used as an excuse to shelter in place and fight against people and ideas from other tribes. The world of avian training and education is quite large. Within it, subgroups are sometimes intolerant of each other. Show trainers, keepers, parrot people, raptor people, veterinarians, falconers, rehabilitators... we all have a seat at this table. By being aware of our biases against other tribes, we can foster a better environment for sharing information and growing together to better support the mission of IAATE: "to promote best practices in the field of avian care, training, and educational programming, and to inspire conservation of avian species and the natural world."

**Presenter Bio:** Stephanie Ashley is a proud member of many different tribes. She began her professional career in avian training and education in 2004 working simultaneously as a Docent at Utah's Hogle Zoo and as a Bird Show Volunteer at Tracy Aviary. Since then, she has spent the past 19 years working with birds in many different capacities: training birds for free flight shows and education programs, as part of a field research team, mitigating human-wildlife conflicts, and as a falconer. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences from Oregon State University in 2021 and is currently serving as the Curator of Birds at the Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho.

## **HPAI Response and Resiliency**

***Anna Tobin, Teton Raptor Center***

**(60-minutes)**

In December of 2022, Teton Raptor Center went into lockdown after the necropsy of two of our avian ambassadors revealed that they had passed away due to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). These two ambassadors were fairly old for their species, and passed away weeks apart, without exhibiting body tremors symptoms of HPAI. Teton Raptor Center is located in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, a major migratory flyway for different species. TRC already had protocols in place due to 10 detected cases of HPAI in our rehabilitation center and the potential for cross contamination between rehab and education. Despite all of our protocols, the unimaginable happened. In this presentation we will talk about the steps we took before, during, and after to prevent any further spread of HPAI. We will also talk about the impact and fallout it had on some of our ambassadors and how we were able to recover and even improve their training. Finally, we will discuss the impact it had on our organization, the protocols we use moving forward, and the resiliency we were able to build for both staff and birds in the face of adversity.

**Presenter Bio:** Anna Tobin is the Education Coordinator for the Teton Raptor Center. After working as an educator and wildlife trainer at five different wildlife facilities across the United States, she attended Alaska Pacific University to obtain an M.S. in Outdoor and Environmental Education. During this time, she tested for and received her CPBT-KA after developing a deep passion for choice-based training and its ability to improve welfare for ambassadors. In her current role, Anna is dedicated to working with her team to bring education programs as well as ambassador welfare and training to new heights.

## **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Bird World**

***Balinda Strosnider, Land on Sky***

**(30-minutes)**

AI (Artificial Intelligence) is the buzz acronym du jour, but what does AI have to do with avian education and conservation? You might be surprised! This is a brief introduction about what AI is, how it can be (and is being) used in our field, and why we don't need to worry about iRobot taking our jobs anytime soon. Or do we?

**Presenter Bio:** Balinda Strosnider, PhD, CPBT-KA started as a volunteer at the largest wildlife rescue organization in the Southwest. She started Land On Sky Publishing and published 3 children's books

about raptors and then expanded by creating Land On Sky Wildlife Experiences, a non-profit, to inspire awe and the feeling of connection with birds of prey and nature. She and her husband, John, moved to northern Arizona to partner with the White Mountain Nature Center in bringing an amazing educational experience to the White Mountains.

## **Connecting with our Bird Display Audiences**

***Andy Hallsworth, Head of Visitor Engagement, Zoological Society of East Anglia.***

**(60-minutes)**

Connection with an audience is fundamental for any presentation. So how do we connect with these people? How do we excite them, make them laugh, make them slightly nervous maybe? How do we get them to care about the wildlife we share the planet with? It's imperative that the presenter and the audience have a good relationship. In this paper I will look at the strategies a presenter may take to connect with the audience, including first impressions, creating rapport, inspiring, educating, giving energy and fresh delivery of dialogue. I will then go on to look at the bird behaviors in shows and attempt to categorize them into brackets.

Species Specific Behavior: Just watching a fish eagle swooping on a pond or secretary bird or seriema killing a rubber snake speaks for itself.

Wow Behaviors: It's almost impossible to impart any facts at the time of these amazing parts of the show other than to explain what is going on. Such as an eagle stooping from height or a falcon passing the lure close to the audience.

Audience participation: This can be a very powerful moment in the show. Allowing a member of the audience to take part in the show is a great experience for that individual. The other audience members experience it vicariously.

I will then go on to showcase four of my favorite behaviors in my displays.

**Presenter Bio:** I have been in the zoo profession since 1987 and spent the first 15 years of my career at ZSL London Zoo. I began as a weekend volunteer and was soon employed as a keeper on the hoofstock section, working closely with giraffes, okapi, Arabian oryx, zebras and other ungulates. In 1992, I was chosen to head a new Animal Events Department at London Zoo, devoted to connecting visitors to the natural world through educational talks and presentations. I developed a pioneering display called "Animals in Action," which was unique at the time in the UK. I headed the team and trained animals as species ambassadors using positive reinforcement techniques, which demonstrated their natural behaviors. During this time, I also developed a free-flying bird display at London Zoo called Predatory Birds.

Since joining Banham Zoological Gardens in 2002, I have developed its birds of prey display into the wider-ranging Birds of the World presentation, featuring a broader range of species to inspire our visitors in regular outdoor arena displays. With my team, I designed and created the "Amazing Animals" presentations in our specially developed indoor theatre. This display features birds and mammals, demonstrating natural behaviors. At the same time, I developed more intimate animal events and presentations at our sister park, the Africa Alive Zoological Reserve. I am an EEP committee member for African white-backed vultures and Ruppell's Griffon Vultures and have visited South Africa to help conduct a nesting study of these amazing birds. In my spare time, I like

to walk in the beautiful Norfolk countryside, spend time on the local river in my kayak and enthusiastically support Norwich City football club.

I have been attending and putting the “I” in IAATE conferences for many years, my first in St Louis in 1996. I’m proud to see how this organization has evolved from its fledgling state back then to a powerful advocate for excellence in husbandry, training, conservation and education in the avian field. It’s an amazing organization, sharing information with like-minded people from around the world.

I have been sharing the natural world with our zoo guests for over thirty years. Inspiring people of all ages and connecting with our visitors through showcasing the amazing animal life with which we share this planet, remains one of the joys of my life.

## **Who’s Afraid of the Big, Bad Vet? Choice and Variation in Veterinary Behaviors**

***McKenzie Bender, Zoo Atlanta***

**(30-minutes)**

At Zoo Atlanta’s World of Wild Theater, we strive to give our animals as much choice in their lives as we can, even with husbandry related behaviors. This began with voluntary nail trims and now includes other medical behaviors conducted by our veterinary staff. We have a macaw who presents his eyes for examination using a slit lamp, and all our parrots are also trained, or in the process of being trained, for voluntary restraints. The bird targets and allows the keeper to restrain the neck followed by body often without the use of a towel or other protection. One of our birds voluntarily steps up into the hand after neck restraint. We have also started the process of training a Harris’ Hawk for voluntary stethoscope. Vet staff is directly involved in training sessions whenever possible and are responsible for some reinforcing throughout. Since prioritizing our animals’ ability to choose to engage with vet staff for medical procedures, we have seen a decrease in stress-related behaviors such as screaming and struggling while in hand during needed procedures.

**Presenter Bio:** I am McKenzie Bender, an Ambassador Animal Keeper at Zoo Atlanta. I graduated from the College of Coastal Georgia in 2016 with a major in Coastal Ecology. After graduation, I began an internship with Zoo Atlanta’s Ambassador Animals department in the World of Wild theater working with the Ambassador birds. From there, I was hired as a seasonal keeper and then full-time keeper for the small animal Ambassadors. A few years later when a position back at the World of Wild theater opened up, I made the move back to where I started as an intern to continue my journey as a keeper and trainer.

## **Slow Down to Speed Up**

***Cassie Malina, CPBT-KA, CPBC, Awesome Animal Solutions***

**(60-minutes)**

As animal caretakers, we regularly run into behavior challenges or have behavior goals we aim to achieve. In this instant gratification world, we often look for the quickest path to achieving goals. We assume training is time consuming, and time is a limited resource. Consider the resources it

takes to clean and maintain an animal's space while they are in there. How many people and how much time does it take to do it well when animal welfare is a priority? Imagine how quickly we could accomplish this task if our animals were trained to reliably, voluntarily enter a shift space and comfortably wait there while we work in their space? If this were achieved, we could confidently utilize our volunteers for more tasks as well. If we commit just 15 minutes/day to train this cooperative shifting behavior, we will find ourselves with saved time to train other valuable behaviors that could contribute to better welfare for our animals and ourselves.

While it is true training takes time, the time is well spent when we move at the animal's pace, employing the most positive, least intrusive effective strategies to achieve our goals. Investing time to build positive, trusting relationships allows us to train more behaviors faster in the future. When our animals trust us to give them space and allow them to control their outcomes, and we provide positive outcomes as consequences for desirable behaviors, animals become more confident, resilient, and willing to learn new behaviors quickly.

Slow down, take the time to truly watch how your animal's body language subtly shifts in response to yours. Focus on how to turn escape behavior into approach behavior. Then, fasten your seatbelt because they will want to learn all the things with and from you and you'll be amazed with what you can accomplish in 15 short minutes.

**Presenter Bio:** Cassie Malina founded Awesome Animal Solutions to offer the most positive, least intrusive effective solutions to anyone looking to help their animals reach their fullest potential. She offers virtual and in person consulting to anyone living or working with animals. During her 22 years with Natural Encounters, Inc., Cassie produced and performed in free flight bird shows at Disney's Animal Kingdom and across the country. She was Parrot Kindergarten's School Counselor for the first two years of the program. She has instructed on the art and science of animal training at numerous workshops, seminars, lectures, webinars, and presentations across the US and abroad. She maintains her IAABC CPBC and IATCB CPBT-KA certifications, and completed Dr. Susan Friedman, Ph.D.'s LLA course. Cassie is a ZAA member and an IAATE member, and she sat on the Executive Board of the IAATE for 20 years, receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2020.

## **Fly Like an Eagle Through the Lens of a Drone: The Training Behind Documentary Filming with Bald Eagles**

***Morgan Bryson, The Raptors***

**(30-minutes)**

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's.... an eagle and a drone? We've all heard about eagles being trained to take down drones, but how about flying together in unison?

We trained two of our Bald Eagles (Hercules, 12, and Triton, 2) to fly alongside several different models of drones for documentary filming purposes. Although film work isn't the main job for our birds, when the opportunity arises it often ends up being a unique opportunity to train our birds new behaviors we may not work on otherwise. While working with some of the most talented drone pilots in the industry and keeping the best welfare and safety of our birds in mind, we are able to create some spectacular 'birds eye view' footage of our eagles.

**Presenter Bio:** Morgan Bryson is a 24-year-old female who was born and raised on Vancouver Island, Canada. She has had the pleasure of working at The Raptors (Pacific Northwest Raptors) for over 11 years (do the math and you'll figure out she was very young when she first started!)! In 2021, Morgan was lucky enough to be part of a staff exchange and spent a month working at the Toronto Zoo- this was an experience she will value forever and never forget! This conference marks the 5<sup>th</sup> IAATE conference Morgan has attended and her 2nd time presenting. In Morgan's spare time, she can be found playing on one of her three softball teams, spending time with friends, family, or her dog.

## **Winging It: Taking a Traditional Bird Show to New Spaces**

***Lacey Zeno, San Diego Zoo Safari Park***

**(30-minutes)**

When most people think of a bird show, they imagine sitting in a theater and enjoying birds flying through the spaces around them. When the bird show at the San Deigo Zoo Safari Park was closed in 2020, we decided to reimagine what a bird show could be. We reimaged the best parts of our program and created new places around our facility to let our birds fly. By collaborating with other departments in our company, we were able to develop several new encounters and spaces for our guests to enjoy our ambassadors. Our programs allowed us to reimagine our conservation messages and continue to inspire our guests.

**Presenter Bio:** I have worked in the animal industry since my first job mopping floors in a vet hospital in high school. I worked with doggy daycares and veterinary hospitals through college until I went to Moorpark College's exotic animal training and management program. I've been working alongside exotic animals ever since. I saw a video while at school of Steve Martin doing the State Fair of Texas show and I was hooked on birds. If you can train a free flight bird, you can train anything. I started working for Natural Encounters, Inc. out of Moorpark. From there I started working at San Diego Zoo Safari Park and have been here for the last 10 years. I worked on the elephant team for several years, and I am currently working on one of the ambassador teams with free flight birds and a couple of mammals. I love San Diego and am so grateful I get to call this place my home. I have been married for 10 years and have two children.

## **Free-flight, The Ultimate form of Control ... Or is it?**

***Steve Martin, Natural Encounters, Inc.***

**(60-minutes)**

Choice and Control are buzzwords in the zoological world these days. Some people string them together as if they are one word or concept. The fact is, they are distinct terms with different meanings. Free-flight is an activity that people often associate with choice and control because of the freedom it allows a bird to make choices and have control in their environment. But is free-flight really that easy to associate with giving an animal choices and control? This presentation will take a hard look at the activity of free-flying birds including various factors that might limit a bird's choices and control even when free-flying, such as food and weight management, motivating operations, current conditions, past history, trainer skill levels, and much more.



**Presenter Bio:** I began my career in the mid-1970s when I set up the first free-flight bird show of its kind. With the success of that show at the San Diego Wild Animal Park came opportunities to set up more programs around the world. My company grew to over 50 professional bird trainers and our consulting opportunities have taken us to zoos all over the world ... mostly teaching mammal keepers the art and science of training to provide better welfare for their animals. We also produce free-flight, educational bird programs at zoological facilities around the world. As a founding member of IAATE, I continue to serve on the board and support the outstanding contributions this organization makes to help animal care professionals and the birds in their care.

## **WORKSHOPS OVERVIEW**

### **The Art of Training Birds and Producing Extraordinary Shows**

***Steve Martin, Natural Encounters, Inc.***

With no knowledge of the sport, a person experiencing their first basketball game ever might think the high school teams they are watching are as good as the sport gets. They don't know there is college and professional levels where the game is played at a higher level of artistic expression. In similar ways, with no knowledge of the science and application of animal training practice or producing truly affective shows when zoo directors, supervisors and even veterinarians view animal training or public presentations at their facility they might think it is as good as it gets. Even most animal trainers in zoological facilities don't know what they don't know or at what level of competency they perform. This workshop will explore what sets average trainers apart from artistic or expert trainers and how to produce shows that go beyond traditional educational programming to incorporate species-appropriate behavior as vehicles for inspirational messages that lead to conservation action.

### **Micro-raptor Equipment Making: Small, Secure, and Subtle**

***Laura Farah, Cascades Raptor Center***

The importance of secure anklets and jesses cannot be overstated. When it comes to equipment for micro raptors, how do we make secure equipment that is also minimally intrusive on the bird and aesthetically obscure? Learn the importance of secure micro anklets and jesses and how to make your own! One hour will be spent walking through making small anklets and one hour on making micro jesses. Accessibility note: Please bring any needed visual aids. For this workshop we will be tying knots, using x-acto blades, scissors, grommet setters, sewing needles – all of which require attention to detail and dexterity of hands. Materials provided.

**Workshop Facilitator Bio:** Laura Farah has been a trainer & educator at Cascades Raptor Center since 2017. Before that, they volunteered for many years, growing into their raptor training, husbandry, equipment-making, and beak coping skills. Laura's previous profession as a Licensed Massage Therapist has crossed over to inform their work with raptors with in-depth knowledge of

anatomy & physiology. Outside of work, Laura loves reading sci-fi & fantasy by BIPOC authors, going on walks & hikes, birding, and being with their friends, family, and their two cats, Oy & Chihiro.

## **Bring the Scale to the Bird: The Art of Antecedent Arrangement**

### ***Sidney Campbell, Cascades Raptor Center***

Artful trainers know that antecedent arrangement can make or break a training session. A brief lecture portion will familiarize or refresh attendees with the A-B-C's of training. Then, learn to recognize and rearrange antecedents as you become the bird (and the trainer) in hands-on scenarios designed to hone your skill.

**Workshop Facilitator Bio:** Sidney Campbell grew up in southern California, developing a deep respect for wildlife conservation and animal ambassadors, watching her uncle work with elephants at the San Diego Zoo. She found her passion for raptors as an intern at the American Bald Eagle Foundation (ABEF) while earning her Bachelor of Science in Biology at the University of Alaska Southeast. A certified professional bird trainer, Sidney is passionate about working animal welfare. As staff at the ABEF, Campbell led a complete aviary redesign and construction project, expanding animal programming opportunities and enhancing visitor accessibility and education. Today, Sidney is Senior Trainer and Educator at the Cascades Raptor Center where she continues to share her passion for raptors with the public. She is a general member on the board of the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators (IAATE) and contributes to the Professional Development Committee as a mentor to other bird trainers. She has presented several workshops and papers on the subject of workplace culture and its impact on welfare. Outside of work, Sidney enjoys birding and exploring the outdoors with her dog, Eider or curling up with a good book and her cat, affectionately known as Cat Cat.

## **Avian Anatomy and Basic Treatments: Essentials to Understand, Evaluate, and Educate**

### ***Kristin Dean, Carolina Raptor Center***

As the champions of flight in the animal kingdom, birds have unique physical features and biological systems that allow them to survive and thrive. Understanding key concepts in avian anatomy and physiology will enable you to become both a better caregiver and communicator. In this workshop we will utilize avian cadavers to take a close look at what makes these fascinating creatures unique and take your skills to the next level.

- Explore major body systems.
- Review internal and external anatomy and function.
- Identify normal vs. abnormal.
- Learn techniques to evaluate and improve welfare.
- Practice basic treatments

**Workshop Facilitator Bio:** Kristin has been working with birds, primarily raptors, for over 18 years. Currently, Kristin oversees the Raptor Rehabilitation Program and Resident Animal Programs at

Carolina Raptor Center. Her experience in rehabilitating, training, and caring for raptors has resulted in a depth of raptor specific knowledge. She also serves on Carolina Raptor Center's leadership team as an integral part of staff development, fulfillment of CRC's mission, and visitor engagement. Kristin has a strong commitment to conservation and strives to inspire people of all ages to have a caring attitude towards nature and engage in conservation practices. Kristin is driven to help improve the welfare of animals in human care. She has presented information in a variety of ways through CRC seminars, NEI's TEC Talks, and IAATE papers, presentations, and articles. She currently serves as a general board member on IAATE Board of Directors, serves as Chair on the IAATE Education Committee, and as a committee member on the Conservation Committee and Professional Development Committee.

