# Hawk Rises From Ashes to Fly Free Again

Wildlife: The bird was badly burned eight months ago in an electrocution that killed her mate. A raptor center rehabilitated her.



### By JAMES E. FOWLER TIMES STAFF WRITER

H-2491 is a red-tailed hawk, but she is also a phoenix.

Eight months after her mate was electrocuted and she was burned by Southern California Edison power lines, the female hawk rose from the ashes and returned to the wild Monday near Camarillo.

Raptor specialist Jerry Thompson held the hawk wrapped in a gray bath towel as her leg was banded. Then he took her to the edge of a ravine and tossed her into the air. After eight flightless months, the unsteady bird flapped across the barranca and landed, staring back at the people on the other side.

Thompson, program director of the Raptor Rehabilitation and Release Program in Simi Valley, did not have a pet name for the hawk. "We don't name them because it would be too sentimental, and we might become attached," Thompson said. "So, we just give them a number. She was H-2491." Experts said the two birds probably touched wings while perched on opposing electrical lines. The male bird exploded into flames, and the female suffered third-degree burns on her legs and 27 damaged feathers—about half her flight feathers—when her wings caught fire. The bird recovered at the Simi Valley-based raptor program. An antibiotic cream designed for humans was used on her legs, and the damaged feathers were repaired with ones molted by other birds or taken from dead birds. Jan Wasserman, the federally licensed bander who helped Thompson with the release, said people in the neighborhood where H-2491 was released had been asking, "When do we get our hawk back?" Marilyn Vahradian and her family had observed the pair of hawks for about eight years. Vahradian said the hawks' nest was in a tree several hundred feet down the hill from her house but that the birds, which live 18 to 25 years, would bring their fledglings to the tree in her yard to teach them to fly and hunt. "I feel like part of my family has come back," Vahradian said. "I just hope she's going to be OK." Ornithologist Elliott McClure also had watched the pair for years during his daily morning walks. "Condominiums destroyed their food Please see HAWK, B5

Raptor specialist Jerry Thompson prepares to release a red-tailed hawk dubbed H-2491 in Camarillo Monday. The bird had been recovering from burns for eight months and many of its flight feathers had to be replaced. Below, Morgan Vahradian, 2, and her brother Andrew, 4, watch the bird fly after its release. "I feel like part of my family has come back," said their mother, Marilyn Vahradian. "I just hope she's going to be OK."





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MARILYN WEISS / For The Times

An identification band is put on the leg of the hawk before her release Monday. About 70% of the center's rehabilitated birds are freed.

# HAWK: Bird Rises From Ashes to Fly Free Again

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supply, and they were unsuccessful in their last breeding attempt," McClure said.

Vahradian said she first knew something was wrong last May when the electricity went out in her home. The transformer on the power pole near her house was on fire. Firefighters showed her the disintegrated remains of the male bird.

'raptor program in 1989, the severely injured bird would have been destroyed.

Each year, Thompson and the other volunteers treat about 150 birds of prey, including hawks, eagles, owls and vultures, he said.

"Everything from car hits, swimming pool accidents, electrocutions, toxins, abandoned nestlings," Thompson said. "A third [of the injuries] are gunshots." Thompson estimated that about 70% of the birds are released as was H-2491. Some must be euthanized, and the rest are sent to educational facilities such as zoos or schools.

The female, found near the bottom of the barranca, was captured in a fishing net by raptor program volunteer Peter Triem.

Daniel C. Pearson, senior terrestrial biologist for Southern California Edison, said that the distance between the wires on the power poles was eight feet and that the red-tailed hawk's average wingspan is 4½ feet.

"It would be physically impossible for a single hawk to have made contact with both wires," Pearson said.

Before Thompson started the

Thompson said the predators are an important part of ecosystem.

"Everything is interwoven and when you take cogs out of the wheel, it's going to collapse," he said.

"You're not going to stop man's encroachment on the environment. The key to coexistence is understanding the animals and their needs."