

## part Two *OUR AVIARIES: CONSTRUCTION & ACCESSORIES*

### *Natural Settings*

The aviaries were not only surrounded with large trees, but were carefully built around whatever trees and plants were already there. Roofs accommodated tall living trees; some trees had “collars” that allowed for trunk growth and sway. There were some big ones—ash, tamarack and basswood.



*A corner of one of the 3 “apartments” in the aviary built by Brian Ratcliff and Robin*

There was some elevation in some aviaries too, where about fifteen years before when the house was about to be built, the earth had been roughly bulldozed from the steep, stony hill at the back. Before we started the bird thing, Robin had hand-built curving limestone walls to support the raw slopes (we were going to have a flower-garden there!) and these were in four of the aviaries, providing changes in height and ground materials and havens for mice and chipmunks.



*ostrich ferns rampant at base of rock wall*

Smaller ones within the usual 12’ to 14’ height included young maples, sumac, elderberry, dogwood, and several large cedars. Ground vegetation was profuse in several—jewelweed and mulberry bushes in the marshy end of the property, ostrich ferns, dogwood and moss in the central ones, and lily-of-the-valley and garlic mustard at the higher end of our small property, and miscellaneous wild plants everywhere.



*part of floor of Hill aviary, with large shaded bathing pool*

## Perches

Varieties of perches, logs and stumps were essential and we offered all the choices we could think of: barked, debarked, astroturfed, roped, fixed, swinging, grapevine, high, low, ramps, and “ladders” (see Goshawk on Pg 3.) So that raptors could choose to be in, say, wind and rain, or windbreak and rain, or overhead shelter, or sun and breeze, and so on. Every aviary tried to offer the following sites for perches:

- ◆ some solid dark corners
- ◆ some open-sided, open-topped (chain-link)
- ◆ some shaded, some in areas of sunshine
- ◆ some under solid roof, others under open roof
- ◆ some perches were also made easy to reach with astroturf-covered ramps. The astroturf on perches was only screwed on and easily renewed when it became tattered.

Again, the raptors taught us about their preferences. A surprise was how favoured was the full-in-the-face north wind sites even in the coldest days of winter, and how annoying the mosquitoes were in windless area—we could hear Red-tails and Roughlegs stamping repeatedly at night. It also became clear over the years that all birds understood from what direction the humans came, and chose perches as far away as possible from this source of their discomfort.

## Sizes and Materials

Design shapes were irregular. The aviaries varied from about 16'x 12' by 10' high for Screech Owls, Saw-whets, kestrels and Sharp-shins. This size could be increased by opening two connecting doors and allowing circular flight. Others were as large as 40' and up to 16' high (too high I now think, too hard to get a flying raptor down for release, for me, anyway.) We used a variety of materials in every aviary: plywood corners and roof panels; plastic-coated chain-link walls and roof panels (varying size of apertures); flexible white fiberglass walls and roof panels; varying sizes of wooden trellis for walls; and some wooden slats walls and roof panels. All this helped to provide more choices for the raptors.



*A favourite night roost for many species; in this instance, a Roughleg, a Red-tail and a Turkey Vulture, who is indicating he would like more space. Apart from an occasional grown or hiss, the vulture got along surprisingly peacefully with his assorted inmates*



*Black-crowned Night Heron high in live basswood. Fractured tarsus is in lightweight thermoplastic cast for support*

## Pools

Because they received whole prey, our raptors rarely drank water, but every aviary had a pool for bathing, which is a necessity and probably a pleasure, though an act which is seldom seen because it usually takes place in private early in the morning. After-bath behaviour was recognizable and there was often evidence of water splashed on the rocks around the pool. Ours were hand-made of concrete moulded over a chicken-wire base, but this material was not best and only for short-term residency as it was rough on soles and talons, and in our winters tended to crack. But they added to the naturalness of each aviary because they usually had frogs hopping in them, and sometimes we used them to keep live fish for a day or two for ospreys or kingfishers.

## Cleaning

About "cleaning." When I gave a talk in Vancouver with slides of our aviaries, someone in the audience asked me how I disinfected them. My reply was, "How do you disinfect your garden?" The principle is the same. The rain washes, and sun dries, the bacteria in the soil recycle feces into earth again. Occasionally we hosed down solid walls behind hawk perches (for looks) and once a year in the fall we distributed pine-needles under perches, again for looks. Daily mouse corpses were put on feeders, logs or stumps. "Whitewash" on the ground wasn't likely to soil their feet or flight-feathers, because hawks and owls don't *want* to be on the ground; even the most disabled managed to get up on a perch, stump, log, or low branch, even if they had to use a ramp to get there.

We have never seen infection or disease arise after admission. In later years we learned how much more sensible it was to put raptors straight into an aviary instead of closeting them inside, subjecting them to smaller prisons, unwanted temperature change, proximity to people, and viewless conditions. When you think about it, indoor cages are mostly for human convenience; in the last two years, I've proved that by keeping the injured only outside whatever the weather.



*the pool in the "apartment" that the herons prefer*



*another bathing pool*

Our only two outdoor problems were (in some years) raccoons, and hippoboscid flies (blood-sucking flatflies) flying to the raptors, probably from the soil where they were hatching. But in the wild, most raptors, and many other birds as well, have their own life-long little crew of hippoboscids anyway. Our aviaries were never crowded; excepting foster-parent family groups, we usually had only one or sometimes two in an aviary at a time. One was best, because there was no doubt about who was casting, eating and how much.

*Kit Chubb*



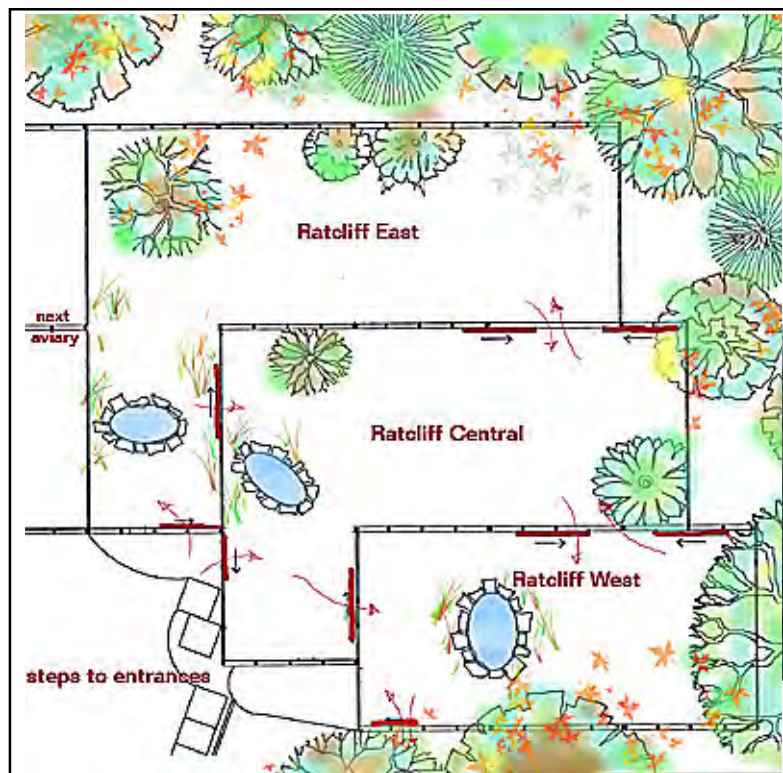
*"the Ratcliff"*

Note the past tense. Due to progressive sensitivity pneumonitis, a.k.a. extrinsic allergic alveolitis (from bird protein) my lungs are too damaged to continue handling birds. As we are a char. org., the aviaries were dismantled and the best parts went to Sue Meech, RN, Napanee (613 354- 0264) who runs Sandy Pines Wildlife (char. org.) and takes in birds as well as mammals, turtles and other injured creatures. The leftovers went to 1-800-JUNK, another char. org.

The clinic building is also funded by donors and can be transported elsewhere. Please inquire.

My work continues: giving advice by phone and email, presenting my trauma studies based on my experiences, large collection of photographs, X-rays and database records. Please keep watching this website for more articles.

*KC*



*Clinic, with 28' skylight, under construction in 1988*

*Brian Ratcliff and Robin built this aviary. Thank you, Brian, for such a lovely structure. Doors are red lines, pools blue*