

Colorado Hawking Club coming to town

Written by Chris Lee

Most people are used to seeing hunters carry guns to hunt with, not birds. That's right—birds.

It's not every day one sees a group of people out in a field hunting for rabbits or pheasants using a hawk or falcon. This weekend that will change.

The Colorado Hawking Club will hold a mini meet in Holyoke Feb. 18-21. The hunters will travel around the countryside—hunting with their raptors.

The process is similar to regular hunting. However, the hunter has a dog and a bird instead of a dog and a gun. They walk through the grass until the dog points or finds a rabbit, pheasant or whatever they are hunting for that day.

The hunter will then send their bird high in the air—not just a hundred feet or so—upwards of 1,000 feet.

Once the dog scares the prey out of hiding, the raptor focuses in and tries to catch it. Director at large of the Colorado Hawking Club Deanna Curtis said it's common to not bag a limit during a single day's hunt.

The weather will also play a key role in the success of the hunters. A windy day could push the hunting birds to another county. This is something Curtis said would be bad.

Curtis uses a red-tailed hawk to hunt with. Other types of hawks are used, as well as species of falcons.

The art of falconry dates back nearly 4,000 years, according to Curtis.

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In Colorado, there are currently only around 200 falconers who enjoy the ancient art.

Even though raptors grow up and learn to hunt, training the birds takes a little time. Curtis' bird was found in the wild at 6 months old. She said she was out hunting with it roughly two weeks later.

Other hunters use birds that were bred in captivity and may take a bit longer to train. "There are a lot of variables," Curtis said.

Mini meets are held around the state such as the one in Holyoke this weekend. An annual hunt is held every year and serves as the main event for the group. It was held in Alamosa this year.

Curtis said Holyoke can expect around 10 falconers to show up for the mini meet to hunt throughout the weekend.

The public is invited to attend an information session Saturday, Feb. 19 at the Peerless Theatre in Holyoke. A short presentation will be held at 4 p.m. to introduce visitors to the art of falconry.

Hunters will then be on hand with their birds from 5:30-6:30 p.m. to give the public a chance to meet them and their hunting birds.

To learn more about the group and the art of falconry, visit www.coloradohawkingclub.com .