



Photos by Lee Hinnant

Mary Ellen Rogers of Sea Biscuit Wildlife Shelter prepares to free an orphaned hawk that was found June 1 and nursed back to health.

Oak Island

Hawk raised by volunteers released back into the wild

By Lee Hinnant
Staff Writer

Wildlife rehabilitators released a red-tail hawk last Saturday, ending a nearly four-month saga that started with a sightless bird found June 1 by an Oak Island man.

"She was blind and naked and an orphan when we got her," said Mary Ellen Rogers, director of Sea Biscuit Wildlife Shelter.

With the help of volunteers, the Oak Island-based shelter cares for about 400 injured, diseased or orphaned birds every year. Many birds need a few days or weeks of daily feeding and care; this tiny hawk hatchling needed nourishment and checking on several times a day.

The little raptor was active by the second day in rehabilitation, Rogers said. It started pecking at one week and grew its initial feathers at 16 days. By day 45, the bird was feeding herself.

Shelter volunteer Beth Green noted how the other birds at Sea Biscuit reacted to the hatchling. Two mature hawks, Scarlett and Glenda, who are permanent residents because their injuries preclude them from foraging for themselves in the wild, watched over the fledgling.

Green said at feeding time Scarlett and Glenda, who are often taken to public education sessions, fairs and schools, "were very protective" of the tiny hawk. "We feed them every day, but we didn't try to get near the baby."

She said the older, apparently female hawks, tore up the baby's food and watched to make sure she was able to digest it.

Sea Biscuit volunteers were initially concerned about letting the baby into the netted enclosure with the two mature female hawks. Instead, they protected and helped her, apparently going



Upon release, the hawk flies quickly to the nearest tall tree overlooking the water and Bill Smith Park.



Using a rehabilitation guide, Beth Green describes how the hawk met the criteria for eventual release back into the wild.

into full-on "mother" mode.

Birds like the rescued red-tail hawk are not given names when there's a good chance they will be released to the wild. The happy outcome of the nameless hawk came Saturday when it was set free at Bill Smith Park on the mainland portion of Oak Island, adjacent to Dutch-

man's Creek.

The hawk flew to one of the closest, tallest trees and surveyed the scene, as volunteers and onlookers took more photographs.

To learn more about the shelter and its work, visit seabiscuitwildlifeshelter.org or call 910-294-2555.