



## CRITTER CREEK WILDLIFE STATION FALL OPEN HOUSE

**SATURDAY, Sept. 16, 2017**

**11:00 AM until 2:00 PM**

The Open House will be unguided, so the pace is leisurely and there are more opportunities to take pictures. Our volunteers will be on hand to answer any questions that you have and to share stories about some of our permanent residents.

Visit our gift shop. We have gifts ranging from children's toys to fine art.



Gate will close at 1:30 pm to allow you enough time to tour.

Entrance is by donation and tour takes 1 ½ hours.

Our field parking is free.

A picnic area is available so bring a lunch. Country Store has refreshments for sale next door.

Call (559) 338-2415 for information or visit [www.crittercreek.org](http://www.crittercreek.org)



Come and watch the Alligator feeding at 12:30



### CIRCLE OF SUPPORTERS MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Categories	Annual Dues
Student	\$ 15
Senior	\$ 15
Individual	\$ 25
Family	\$ 50
Sponsor	\$ 100
Patron	\$ 250
Corporate or Life	\$ 1000

Make checks payable to:  
Animals for Education

Members receive our quarterly newsletter  
Visit [CritterCreek.org](http://CritterCreek.org) to see back issues of the Chronicle

Mail to:  
Critter Creek Wildlife Station  
36710 Sand Creek Road  
Squaw Valley, CA 93675



## Meet Our Permanent Resident: Zephyr American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

Kestrels, sometimes called sparrow hawks, are actually a kind of falcon. They are one of the smallest and most common falcons found in the Central Valley. They are close to 11 inches tall with a wingspan of 1 ½ to 2 feet. Their body coloration varies with gender. The males have blue-gray wings, reddish brown backs and tails, and light-colored chests and abdomens. The females are duller in color, lacking the bluish wings, but are speckled and barred creating a camouflaged effect. Both have striking black



Zephyr showing off his plumage

markings on each side of their faces. They are a small bird, so they become prey themselves for larger birds of prey. A defensive adaptation they have is black markings at the back of their head slightly above their necks. These markings give the appearance of eyes. Even when they are unaware of a threat, they are protected since any larger birds think that the kestrel is looking right at them losing any element of surprise. Their prey ranges from rodents to small birds. As with most falcons, they can fly very quickly in pursuit of birds. They also can hover over prey like a kite. Their vocalization is an easily distinguishable feature—a chattering, scolding call.



Note two dark markings and the “V” shape that imitate eyes and beak

Zephyr arrived this spring from a family who habituated him to the point that he lands on your shoulder, takes food from you, etc. We are currently working with him, so he can become an educational bird. He certainly seems to have the right disposition.

## Turkey Vultures Keep Neighborhoods Clean

Turkey vultures are nature’s sanitary engineers. Their daily habits of cleaning up deteriorating and often diseased carcasses make them indispensable as man’s neighbor. Turkey vultures have extremely sensitive senses of smell—a very unusual trait for a bird. Dangerous gas leaks and toxic wastes can be located by using the vulture’s keen sense. Also, the creature’s ability to conserve energy has intrigued researchers for decades. Researchers see turkey vultures as marvels of energy conservation. A turkey vulture’s whole life is spent trying to conserve every little calorie it gets. A turkey vulture actually turns down its body temperature requirements at night. To warm up the following morning, the bird contorts its body unlike any bodybuilder. Finally it settles on spreading its often five to six feet wing span to catch every ray of available sun.



Turkey Vultures warming in the morning sunshine

The prehistoric looking bird also practices a behavior called *urohidrosis*. Having no sweat glands, the bird cools itself during hot spells by defecating on its feet. The slurry of white uric acid in the feces

contains moisture that cools by evaporating. It requires no sweating which in turn requires no metabolic increase. Another basic energy conserving maneuver is staying in one place for long periods of time. If the weather is bad for flying, they can and will sit at their roost for days. Remember, their metabolism is low innately, so fasting for a few days is really no big deal for these birds. The ability to go without food for several days helps turkey vultures survive because they literally never know where their next meal will occur. The turkey vulture does not use much energy when taking off or landing because of its long, broad wings. They are designed for excellent lift. Turkey vultures are also graceful, almost effortless fliers. They ride air thermals searching for “downed” food over dozens of square miles flapping their wings only a few times. They locate food—often road kill or animals that have died—by smell. Turkey vultures can literally eat food so decayed and rotten that it would kill any other creature that ingested it. They have evolved into detoxification systems. By eating such unappetizing food along roads and wherever the animal died, turkey vultures act as a disease preventing mechanism for society. Biologists have discovered that turkey vultures have botulism-resistant nervous systems and extremely powerful immune systems that literally ward off bacterial toxins. In one laboratory experiment, a scientist injected a turkey vulture with a dose of botulinus toxin lethal enough to destroy some 300,000 guinea pigs. The lab bird never showed any illness.

Turkey Vultures coming together to roost for the night



Turkey vultures survive encounters with man by becoming almost docile. They are very shy, cautious creatures. When trapped and overpowered, they usually go limp. When extremely stressed, a turkey vulture becomes more submissive than usual. When frightened, they have a tendency to regurgitate their last meal. The vomit is as bad or worse than skunk spray! In captivity, hooding the turkey vulture when it has to be handled helps prevent vomiting. Turkey vultures are not the image of impending death as they are often pictured. Actually they are shy, inoffensive birds that provide a valuable service to our communities. (article from North American Wildlife Health Care Center)

In some areas of the Central Valley these birds migrate to the coast or to Mexico.. This migration is approaching so enjoy watching them while they are still in the Valley.

## Releases Are in Full Swing

Critter Creek Wildlife Station has begun releasing birds of prey, like this male and female kestrel. We have already released barn owls, mallards, Canada geese, bittern, crows, squirrels, opossums, and various song birds so far this year.

These releases are taking place in Kings, Tulare, and Fresno counties.

