



*Southwest Wildlife Foundation of Utah  
Wildlife Ambassador Biography*

**Belle**

*with timestamps of accompanying video*

**Hatch Date (0:22 - 0:38)**

March 22, 2018

**License Date (0:38 - 0:49)**

August 8th, 2018

**Common Name (0:49 - 1:26)**

Harris Hawk

The Harris Hawk is a North American Bird. We find them here in the United States, in Southern Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

This little gal came from a captive breeding program out of Louisiana. That's where she gets the name "Belle" from because she's my little Southern Belle.



## Scientific Name (1:26 - 2:17)

*Para Buteo*

The Buteo is a broad wing hawk and para is kind of like saying it is a broad wing hawk, but not really. Your Buteos are Red Tail Hawks, Swainsons Hawks, Ferruginous Hawks, Rough Leg Hawks.

There's a lot of Buteos which is the broad wing hawk.

The Harris Hawk has a broad rounded wing, but it has a very, very long tail like an accipiter hawk. She also has longer legs more like an accipiter hawk. She's much more beefy and much more powerful than most accipiter hawks.

So she's classified as a Para Buteo.

## Group (2:17 - 2:37)

*Para Buteo*

She is a group of one. The Harris Hawk is the only Para Buteo because they are so unique in their design.

## Weight (2:37 - 2:55)

42 or 43 ounces in weight. She's a very very large Harris Hawk.



### **Wingspan (2:55 - 3:36)**

About three feet.

They don't have a long wingspan. It's a relatively shorter, rounder, broad winged hawk. They are not a high speed soaring bird. They are basically more agile. They are a sprint kind of a bird.

### **Diet (3:36 - 4:15)**

In the wild they eat a wide variety of rodents, small reptiles and birds. Here in captivity she gets kind of the same. She gets a lot of rats and mice, quail, pigeon and she gets rabbits. We try to duplicate their natural diet as much as we possibly can in captivity to help keep them healthy.

### **Activities (4:15 - 5:53)**

The nice thing is she is one of my falconry birds, not just a wildlife ambassador. So the hunting season is from September through February. We go out on the desert and she flies free. She and I go wandering out through the brush in the desert flushing rabbits for her to catch. She spends a great deal of time chasing rabbits.

In the off season, she basically spends her time hanging out with me. She likes to come in the house. In fact she sleeps in the house in winter time, it is too cold for the Harris Hawk because they are a southern bird. She has a perch in an unfinished room down in my basement. She comes in and hangs out on the perch in the evening times.



She does like to just hang out. We throw a towel down and hang out in the living room. We watch television together. She is kind of a member of the family.

We travel throughout the western United States doing School Programs and Scout Programs and Community Event Programs. She's a great wildlife ambassador. She's a wonderful, wonderful educator.

Other than that, she's just kind of fat and sassy right now

## **Temperament (5:53 - 7:19)**

The Harris Hawk, in general, is one of the finest temperament birds in the world. They are one of the only birds of prey in the world that hunts in packs like wolves. They hunt in groups so they are really good about cooperating and working together as a team. That makes them uniquely qualified for falconry because, when raised and handled properly, they work with humans.

She's the hunter, I'm her dog and so we develop a partnership that's really quite rare in the animal world. They have a communal, cooperative, personality. They have a very stable disposition. They are not a high strung or nervous animal like some of the other hawks and falcons can be.

And so just an absolute joy. Also, their intelligence, extremely bright. They do remember everything and so they learn how to capitalize and how to use people in assisting them in their abilities to hunt and catch food for themselves. Really super smart. Certainly smarter than most birds of prey, not all, but certainly smarter than most.



### **Personality (7:29 - 9:59)**

Personality, like I said, just gentle, sweet, wonderful to work with. She is adaptable, just a great animal.

Belle is really very typical of Harris Hawks that I've worked with. I really have never had a Harris Hawk or worked with a Harris Hawk that wasn't just a joy to be able to handle and to work with. Belle is exactly the same.

But you know in saying that, if you don't raise them properly, because they are so incredibly intelligent, they can be a real nightmare. They can actually be quite dangerous.

If you have one of these hawks and you raise it inappropriately and you imprint them to humans and they have no respect for humans they can be dangerous. If you do something to offend them, they will hurt you. But when they are handled appropriately, then they are just an absolutely wonderful animal to work with.

I've had Harris Hawks that were quite dangerous. I've had another female, very much like Belle here, that had been stolen from its nest by some teenage boys and imprinted and raised badly and abused and all that kind of stuff. She was quite dangerous. I had to be very careful because she'd attack people in the field. In fact she was so emotionally disturbed, her favorite thing to hunt was cows. If there was a cow within a mile, she had to go beat up a cow.

So they can be dangerous and hard to work with if you don't have the skills and expertise to handle them and raise them properly. But when they are raised properly, like I said, there isn't a more gentle and interesting animal on the planet than a well handled Harris Hawk for falconry and for education



### **Story of Arrival (9:59 - 12:04)**

Belle is, like I said, a dear member of the family. She came to us out of a captive breeding program out of Louisiana. We contacted the breeder and he shipped her to us. The closest airport that we could fly her into was Salt Lake International which is about a five hour drive from us here.

My sweet wife Susan and I drove up to Salt Lake City to the airport. They got her off the plane, got her into the cargo area and we picked her up. Her transport box was all blocked off so we really couldn't even see her.

As soon as we got her home, I had all the equipment ready to put on her. Her anklets, the bells, the leather straps called jesses the swivel, everything was ready to go. We got her out of her box and we got her outfitted with all of her equipment.

We spent a great deal of time sitting in the living room with her on my glove and just starting to get her used to her environment. She was nervous because it was a new place, it didn't take her very long, just a few days, to get settled in, to accept me and the surroundings, and start to enjoy her life.

We have lots of videos on our youtube channel of her first day with us, and the processes that we go through in training her. Videos of her out flying free and hunting rabbits. Our youtube channel is a great place to go and learn a lot about Belle, a lot about Harris Hawks, and a lot about falconry.



## Treats (12:04 - 14:53)

Food is more about a necessity than a treat for her. I think her favorite food is jack rabbit, but to be honest with you, it doesn't really matter if it's jack rabbit or mice or quail or pigeon or cottontail. Basically she enjoys eating. She likes all of the normal food.

Let me qualify this for everybody else, that you do need to understand, if you think you're going to be a falconer. You do have to understand that you can't go to the local grocery store and get dead rats in the frozen food section. You have to set up the ability to provide food. Whether you order frozen quail, rats and mice from companies, like we use a company called Rodent Pro. We order in thousands and thousands of dollars worth of food every year for the animals.

Whether you breed your own rats and mice, raise your own quail, raise your own pigeons. You do have to develop a food source when you're working with these animals. You cannot feed them meat. Meat is not good for them. You have to feed them whole animals.

As far as activities, her very favorite thing in the world to do is to go hunting. That's her biggest motivation. I mean, she does do really well when we travel and do our shows. She does very well when visiting people, privately at my home and hanging around and going for walks and those kinds of things.

But she knows, her personality starts to change, she knows that when we start to bring her weight down a little bit and she becomes a little bit hungry, then her keenness picks up and her personality gets sharper and she starts to act like an apex predator.



When we go out in the field she knows that we're going. It's different and she knows that it's different. I put her in the hawk box, the transport box, and she knows if we're going to go do a show versus whether we're going to go hunting. How she knows, I'm not sure. Whether she reads my body language or what it is, but she knows and she wants to get into that box, and she wants to get out to the field. She wants to go out and hunt and chase rabbits. That's the funnest thing that she likes to do.

### **Life Expectancy (14:53 - 15:42)**

Life expectancy in the wild is about 7 to 10 years for a Harris Hawk like this. In captivity we can double that, 15 to 20 years would be considered normal.

My last Harris Hawk was named Thumper. He was a male and he lived 29 years before he passed away. About the last ten years he'd certainly slowed down a bunch. He really didn't hunt very much, but he liked to go out to the field and fly free. He would chase lizards. He did like his personal time.

Belle should be around for close to thirty years as a friend and as a companion and as a wildlife ambassador.