

Raptors at The Salmon Festival.

It was field trip day last week for Robert who is in third grade. He was particularly excited because it wasn't going to be the ordinary kind of field trip that schools make, you know, to a park, or the fire station, or a bakery. It was to the town of Leavenworth which is about a half hours drive. Each year, among other celebrations, there is The Salmon Festival. On the outskirts of town, there is a salmon hatchery which opens its doors to the public. The salmon have returned from their long, long trip around the ocean, and have come back to spawn. It is an important part of the Northwest culture because the salmon are plentiful here, and huge. Because the Salmon Festival has been held for many years, it has expanded substantially. Now there are different sections that teach about other wildlife, and even Native American Indian history and tradition. Well, after our short trip on the bus, we got off, and walked to the Raptor section of the Festival. We sat in the shade of a pine tree, and listened to an expert on birds of prey. She had a display of four stuffed birds: a golden eagle, a bald eagle, an osprey, and an eagle owl. Though they weren't alive, the creatures were very impressive. We learned all sorts of facts about them. There are only two types of eagles in North America. That really surprised me, because there are 48 species in total. The golden eagle is larger than the bald eagle, which, you may remember, is the symbol of the United States. Unlike many predatory animals, the females are larger than the males. The lady who spoke to us really kept our attention. She had obviously spoken to children for many years, because she knew how to keep the flow of information fast and fun. At one point, she was talking about the wingspan of the birds. Two students held up a large banner that showed the 7ft wingspan of a bald eagle. One by one, children and adults stood with their backs to it, to see if their arm span was equivalent. Of course, nobody's was. Then she talked about the sound of wings, and how different shaped wings sound different as the bird flies. Eagles have feathers sticking out of the ends of their wings, so they make a swooshing noise. Owls, on the other hand are silent fliers; their wings are rounded and smooth, so they can sneak up on their prey. The children were very impressed with the talk. I could hear some of them telling each other their own stories of seeing birds of prey in our area. We had a few free minutes to walk around afterwards, and I was really pleasantly surprised to find a live display of birds of prey. A shy looking golden eagle was held by a bird trainer, and several other birds were on perches observing the people as we observed them. The bald eagle stared with its well known piercing frown, and the osprey and owls just looked out with little expression; their minds must have been elsewhere, up in the clouds, I'm sure.

Related vocabulary: elsewhere, the outskirts, raptor, to sneak up on...

1. The newly released prisoner wasn't allowed to live in this town, so he had to go elsewhere.
2. The center of town is too busy for us, so we decided to live on the outskirts.
3. The eagle owl is an impressive raptor that is strong enough to bring down a young deer.
4. The cat quietly watched the birds play, planning to sneak up on them and perhaps catch one.

