

# Big Red Begins 2024 Breeding Season With Toe Injury

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As we enter the 12th breeding season with Big Red, the beloved matriarch of the Red-tailed Hawk Cam, viewers may notice that she has sustained an unknown injury to her right foot. Cornell Lab of Ornithology staff have been working with experts on campus to monitor Big Red and provide the cam community with an update on Big Red's health moving forward into the nesting season.



Big Red hovers over her first egg at the Cornell Hawks nest.

Please refer to the FAQs below for information about Big Red's injury, the attempts to provide assistance to Big Red, and the plans to monitor her moving forward into the breeding season.

## What Happened To Big Red?

Big Red appears to have sustained an unknown injury to her right foot. When or how Big Red injured her foot is not clear. Big Red was first observed favoring her right leg during a short visit to the Cornell Hawks nest in late January. Further observations on campus revealed that Big Red's front-inner digit on her right foot was noticeably swollen, although the origin of the injury is still unknown.

## How Serious Is Big Red's Injury?

Wildlife veterinarians at Cornell's Janet L. Swanson Wildlife Hospital were consulted about Big Red's injury. Veterinarians advised that they would not be able to determine the origin of the injury without an exam but that it appeared to be a chronic injury unlikely to resolve on its own. They also noted that the band did not appear to be constricting the tissues but that if further swelling leads to constriction it could rapidly worsen the problem.

Despite her injured toe, Big Red is healthy enough to fly, capture prey, attend to her nest, and eat. These are all positive signs, and Cornell Lab of Ornithology staff will continue to work with campus vets and local observers to monitor her ongoing activity and well-being.

## What Is Being Done To Help Big Red?

Because veterinarians advised that Big Red's injury may not recover without treatment and that further swelling could rapidly worsen the problem, Cornell Lab staff enlisted the help of an experienced team to help provide assistance to Big Red before the breeding season in order to assess the injury, remove her band if necessary, and provide treatment.

The team included skilled observers to help track Big Red's whereabouts and Cornell scientists and veterinarians who are permitted to trap wild birds and provide veterinary care.

Despite several attempts, Big Red evaded capture prior to the breeding season. Capturing an individual, free-flying hawk is a difficult task with a low success rate. We're grateful to the team for offering their time and expertise in an attempt to aid Big Red.

Now that Big Red has laid eggs, plans to capture her have been suspended so that the hawks can focus on having a successful breeding season.

## What Are The Plans For The Red-Tailed Hawk Cam Moving Forward?

The Red-tailed Hawk Cam will continue streaming as Big Red and Arthur attempt to raise another generation of hawks over Cornell University's campus. Cornell Lab staff and campus experts will continue to monitor Big Red's well-being and remain hopeful that she will be able to recover naturally with time. We thank the cam community for your support and patience as the team does their best to help Big Red.

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