

Campus news

# Nox the falcon died of pneumonia, says UC Davis veterinary pathology report

UC Berkeley's youngest falcon died Oct. 23 after being released into the wild just three days earlier.

By Gretchen Kell



Nox took his first flight on campus on June 5. About a month later, he was found injured in the Berkeley Marina and taken to the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine with a broken wing.

Bridget Ahern for UC Berkeley

## December 5, 2024

An assessment completed this week at the [UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine](#) determined that pneumonia caused the Oct. 23 death of Nox, the youngest member of UC Berkeley's well-known falcon family.

Nox was found with a broken wing on July 3 in the Berkeley Marina and taken to UC Davis for [surgery](#). He was [released](#) back into the wild on Oct. 19 following three months of treatment and rehabilitation at the UC Davis [California Raptor Center](#). Three days later, the young raptor was rescued again in Richmond and returned to the veterinary school.

Nox was found on examination to be severely anemic and emaciated. He received a blood transfusion from a healthy peregrine there, but after some improvement in his condition, [he died](#).

A team of pathologists at UC Davis then performed a post-mortem exam on Nox.

In addition to severe weight loss and anemia, "there was bacterial infection in the air sacs and some infiltration in the lungs. The bird was diagnosed with pneumonia. We were stunned that this could happen so quickly," said Michelle Hawkins, director of the UC Davis Raptor Center.



Nox, also known as Little Boy Blue, sported a blue bandage after surgery on his broken wing.

Courtesy of UC Davis California Raptor Center

But Hawkins said it's unfortunately impossible to know "how he got to that point so rapidly after release."

The day of his release at an East Bay shoreline park, Nox was "eating, hunting, flying. He appeared to the entire team to be ready for release," she said. He'd spent several weeks perfecting his hunting skills with a falconer.

Nox flew some 80 miles the day he returned to the wild, and he also traveled quite far the following day, according to tracking data followed by [Cal Falcons](#). The third day, he was found in the backyard of a Richmond residence and rescued by a neighbor.

Nox's remains will be taken to the [Museum of Vertebrate Zoology](#) at UC Berkeley.

At the California Raptor Center, Hawkins said the team "always debriefs after any unexpected death to see what went well and how we can improve, for future cases. Because of Nox's case, we'll now include an evaluation of a bird's red and white blood cells right before release.

"This is not standard protocol for most wildlife facilities, but we are making this a new standard for raptor releases from the California Raptor Center in the future."

Sean Peterson, an environmental biologist with Cal Falcons, said that despite the grief people feel about Nox's death, "this is a learning experience for all of us.

"The data we collected during Nox's brief return to the wild and rehabilitation will help us better care for other rescued wildlife. It hurts that we aren't still watching him explore the world, but we're grateful for the peek we had into his life."

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