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## Red-Tailed Hawk Cam Still a Hit, Returns with New York City Audubon and Educational Focus

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[1] Rosie, a red-tailed hawk, in *The New York Times Hawk Cam streaming live* [1].

Twelve stories above New York City's Washington Square Park, Rosie, a red-tailed hawk, diligently sits in a nest, warming two small eggs and surveying the air around her. A soft breeze ruffles Rosie's feathers and the dull hum of tourists reaches her spot on the ledge outside New York University President John Sexton's office in Bobst Library. Unbeknownst to Rosie, over 400 people are watching this moment, enraptured with the expectant raptor.

The livestream [1] of Rosie's nest, set up by *The New York Times' City Room blog* [2] last year, is a collaboration between the *Times* and NYU, aimed at giving viewers an up-close glimpse of nature. Since it began, the cam has inspired a supportive community and an appreciation for city wildlife. For its second year, the live Hawk Cam returned with a more educational focus, partnering with New York City Audubon [3].

"We are delighted to add an educational component to this year's coverage of the hawks," says Emily S. Rueb, Hawk Cam creator and senior producer on the *Times'* Metro desk. "The

experts at NYC Audubon are a tremendous resource for us and our readers.”

The partnership emerged out of NYU’s experience last year, says university spokesman John Beckman.

“This year, we knew we wanted the Hawk Cam to offer a bit more,” Beckman explains. Since NYU does not have a veterinary school or depth in ornithology, Beckman says the university thought it would be beneficial to have a partner with expertise on the topic.

When NYU contacted them in February, NYC Audubon was pleased to be the voice of ornithology on the project, explains Susan Elbin, director of conservation and science at NYC Audubon. While the webcam was successful in bringing wildlife into the homes of many who would not normally be aware of avian diversity in the city, some discussions on the livestream chat platform and on other sites were misinformed, Elbin says. The partnership will likely ease any misinformation: As part of the collaboration, Elbin and other experts will answer readers’ questions about hawks and other birds in the city, appearing in a series of Q&As for and by the *Times* and City Room.

“We can focus discussions about bird conservation in general — about NYC conservation issues in particular — by responding to and commenting on activity in and around the Washington Square Hawks’ nest,” Elbin says. “I think that birders and non-birders alike have, through the webcam, become neighbors to the hawks,” she adds.

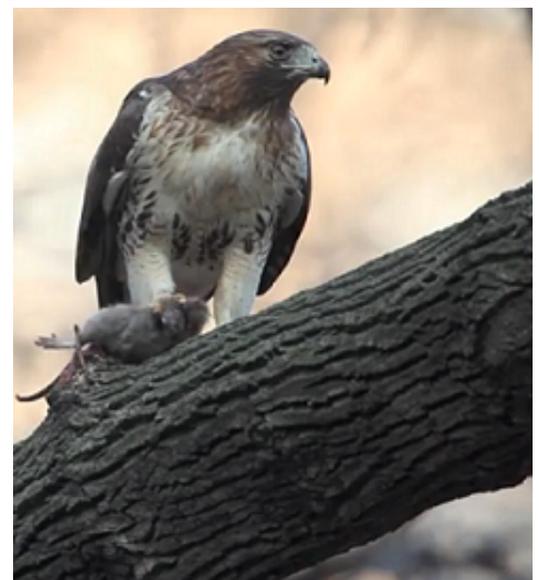
Last year, viewers fell in love with Bobby and Violet, mates who built the Washington Square nest, eventually fledging their daughter Pip. While Violet — named for NYU’s mascot — died last December of complications following surgery to amputate her necrotic foot, Bobby found another mate, Rosie, igniting a second year of dutiful watching. Since the first livestream began, several independent websites following the nest were also started.

Paula Eisenberg, a devout Hawk Cam follower, created [Washington Square Park Hawks](#) <sup>[5]</sup> last June as a “quieter” forum and chat room to discuss the live feed and keep in touch with other cam-lovers when the season ended in August.

“We all started watching the cam initially because it was so interesting to see the birds, but then we found other common interests, and developed some real friendships,” Eisenberg explains. Her site, independent from the *Times*, requires registration and is a place for members to post poems, thoughts, and questions about anything.

“More, as the year progressed, it opened people to relationships in new ways,” explains one of the site’s regulars, George Campbell. “The community there has been nothing short of amazing in its support of its various members, perhaps no example more so than their personal support of me this last year.” A year ago, when the Hawk Cam first began, Campbell’s wife became sick. After a hard summer, she died last October.

“There were always, always people here at odd hours when I got home from the hospital,



Rosie (Photo: screenshot from [YouTube video](#) <sup>[4]</sup> CC Bruce Yolton)

waiting to listen, to talk, to be supportive,” Campbell says.

In addition to fostering a supportive community like WSP Hawks, the cam is also a means to connect with nature.

“It has become more about nature, our relationship to it, and our relationship to one another,” Campbell says.

Colin Jerolmack, assistant professor of sociology and environmental studies at NYU, says he believes the Hawk Cam is an easy way for people to satisfy their fascination with the wild.

“I think a lot of people have a bit of Henry Thoreau in them,” explains Jerolmack, who wrote about last year’s Hawk Cam with Hillary Angelo in the winter 2012 issue of *Contexts*, the official publication of the American Sociological Association. “In the comfort of our own home, or on our computer monitor at work, we can forge a sense of connection with the natural world — a temporary mental or experiential escape.”

While many people’s attraction to the hawks stems from a desire to commune with nature, Jerolmack adds, most humans will anthropomorphize them in order to be able to identify with them.

“A lot of people, for instance, were upset that Bobby found a new mate so quickly after Violet was removed by a rehabilitator,” he says. “Perhaps Audubon can play a role in getting people to care about the hawks vis-à-vis their relationship to other species — not via their relationship to humans.”

Elbin explains that encouraging viewers’ understanding of the hawks may increase appreciation for birds in general.

“I think that people see them as part of their family. People tend to forget that these are wild birds — we don’t own them, and they are not our pets,” she says.

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.livestream.com/nytnestcam>

[2] <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/category/hawk-cam-live-from-the-nest/>

[3] <http://www.nycaudubon.org/>

[4] [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nvg9KsNAkKs&feature=player\\_embedded#!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nvg9KsNAkKs&feature=player_embedded#!)

[5] <http://wsphawks.com/>