

Hawk dive-bombing residents of Willow Glen neighborhood

Sean Webby, San Jose Mercury News 04/19/2010

Having a dearth of experience with being attacked by a predatory bird, Maurice Carrubba ducked into his Willow Glen home in San Jose Monday morning and spent a few minutes doing a Google search.

Then he made a call.

Responding that afternoon to Ellis Avenue in a purple-and-white rescue vehicle with two dogs sharing the front seat, Rebecca Dmytryk and Duane Titus handed out cards — WildRescue of Moss Landing — deployed binoculars, spotted the vigilant bird perched on a nearby tree and announced their remedy.



They handed Carrubba a purple umbrella.

The Cooper's hawk divebombing residents in a their tony, tree-lined block is only protecting its eggs, they explained to Carrubba and a gaggle of interested neighbors. The umbrella would discourage the hawk and protect against attacks until the birds relocate after their young can fly.

"It's not raining out but when you come outside your front door, shield yourself and your family," Dmytryk told Carrubba.



"It kind of acts like a scarecrow," Carrubba noted. And when he heard they could even adorn it with painted eyeballs or red streamers, he realized the parental potential: "We have an art project!"

As much as that can be an unsettling thing for a parent of young children or a cat owner, self-defense as a motive only goes one way — for the birds. Not that the courts are choked with such prosecutions, but harming, even disturbing the raptor family would be a crime.

The aggressive behavior is a sure sign of spring, animal experts say, as birds nest and raise their young. And they hoped their impromptu nature lessons taught Monday afternoon on Ellis Avenue would resonate around the Bay Area to teach people to leave such protected creatures be.

That was Carrubba's first instinct.

He and other neighbors started to notice the raptors among the tree branches a few months ago.

But at the end of a jog early Monday morning, Carrubba was steps from his home when he felt the talons grabbing at the hood of his Ed Hardy black sweatshirt with a snake emblem on it, snatching it from his head.

"Feeling good, doing the healthy thing and I was on the phone and when I turned around it hit me," he said. Then, half an hour later, he went out on the patio and he looked up — and they locked eyes as it almost nailed him again.

"She is just protecting her family," he said, (maybe making a leap as to the bird's gender; the WildRescue people felt it was probably a male.) I protect my own kids. It's part of life I guess."

He put a stuffed parrot on his lawn, as part bait, part joke. But some — mostly the women in the small crowd — theorized the bird of prey selectively went after men.

One neighbor said he had been working on his computer and said the hawk divebombed next door neighbor Dolores Lisenbee.

He later said that he had been suspicious of Lisenbee's cats, after finding the remains of birds on his lawn.

Lisenbee saw the situation less as a Hitchcockian experience than as an example of the biodiversity of Willow Glen.

"I don't consider this a nuisance. It's the charm," she said. "We get a lot of wildlife here, possums, raccoons, we have rats. I wouldn't complain about this."

For Dmytryk, WildRescue's project director, founder and CEO, it was one more call on a busy day.

There was the injured raccoon in Morgan Hill, and in Santa Cruz County the sick fox and the 13 ducklings in a pool.

"We have to ask for some tolerance and understanding and give people real things to do," she said.

