

Thunder

Training Plan

Jan 2016

The purpose of this training plan is to outline the training approach, specific goals, diet and interaction of Thunder (Wedge-tailed Eagle – Aquila Audax)

History:

Thunder is a young male Wedge-tailed Eagle who arrived at Billabong Sanctuary in Jan 2015 and was displayed in the large aviary at the back of the park. During the initial few months, he would fly into the mesh wall of the aviary and sustained injuries to his eyebrows and beak, and the carpal joints of both wings. He would seem to settle down for a few weeks and then something would frighten him and he would fly into the mesh again. He was removed from the aviary and taken to the vet (July 2015). His injuries were determined to be superficial and he was placed on a course of antibiotics. Thunder was re-housed in an aviary off display and quite enclosed. Shade cloth was placed over the window to prevent visual stress. It took around three months for his injuries to fully heal. During this time he was fed primarily whole food items such as rats and quails, as well a kangaroo haunch. He was also given Wombaroo Insectivore mix as a supplement on his food.

During this time his food amount was gradually adjusted based on his behavior and response.

He was fed regularly from the glove in order to build trust. Gradually he was offered the glove to step onto. The following is an outline of the techniques used to build trust and train Thunder to sit on the glove.

The goal of this Training Plan:

The end-goal of Thunder's training to be able to:

- Be walked around the park on the glove
- Be placed on a mobile stand
- Interact with the public (perch beside for a photo)

Three Elements:

There are three main elements to the first phase of the training:

1. Progression through training stages
2. Increasing time spent on the glove
3. Variety of handlers.

Each of these three elements is essential and complimentary. Progress in all three elements is required, however steps 1-5 focus on manning (increasing the time on the glove) and introducing new handlers. By increasing the time spent on the glove, and the number of handlers, Thunder will gradually become more comfortable around people and this is a prerequisite to moving onto steps 6 – 12.

Note: This Training Progression is a guide only and is subject to change if required.

Handlers should be aware of current progress and have a clear determination as to the goal of the training session. However this may change depending on Thunders reaction on any given day. If progression to the next step is proving difficult, reinforce the previous step until progression is possible.

PHASE 1

1. Build trust in the glove
 - a) Feeding from the glove
 - b) Placing the glove on the perch beside to familiarize

2. Step onto the glove
 - a) Touching the glove to foot before feeding
 - b) Placing the glove on feet gently before feeding
 - c) Pressing glove lightly against legs to prompt stepping up before feeding

3. Stay on the glove
 - a) Gradually increasing the time spent on the glove to build confidence

4. Allow handler to touch jesses.
 - a) Handler to have right arm in position, grasp jesses as Thunder steps up
 - b) Handler able to move right arm freely and grab jesses

5. Allow handler to attach jesses to glove.
 - a) Attach jesses
 - b) Move freely around aviary
 - c) Recover after baiting

PHASE 2

6. Move outside aviary
7. Become comfortable outside aviary.
8. Transfer from glove to perch.
9. Transfer from perch to glove.
10. Walk around park
11. Transfer to perch at photo hut
12. Interact with public (photos)

Record Keeping:

It is important to keep a record of each training session. Key components are:

- Food Type and Amount
- Handlers involved
- Goal of the training session (this may change depending on Thunders response)
- Details of what actually occurred during the session.
- Any additional comments or observations

Diet:

Thunders diet consists of Roo, Rat, Quail, DOCs or any other appropriate meat product.

The base quantity is 120g, however this will be changed daily by the handlers completing the training session, based on Thunders initial response and the outcome.

Food Response:

For the purpose of this training plan, Thunders body language is defined as follows:

Strong Food Response:

Feathers of nape (back of neck) erect

Standing upright

Wings extended downwards

May or may not be vocal (usually a high pitched whining sound)

Waiting on the front perch when entering aviary

Medium Food Response:

Feathers of nape erect or partially erect

Standing upright

Wings partially or fully extended downwards

May be on front or rear perch of aviary

Low Food Response:

Usually on back perch of aviary

May briefly erect feathers of nape

May briefly extend wings downward

Looking around

Will fly to other perch when approached