

Drones at Red Rocks

 evergreenaudubon.org/drones-at-red-rocks

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Several Evergreen Audubon members recently voiced concerns about drones and other disturbance to nesting falcons at Red Rocks Park. Margo Constable asked Dennis Brown, Park Ranger Supervisor for Denver Mountain Parks, for clarification on DMP's policy. We decided it would be useful to share Mr. Brown's response, paraphrased below, to inform Evergreen Audubon members.

According to Mr. Brown, flying of UAS (unmanned aerial systems or "drones") by the public is not permitted in any Denver park and is specifically mentioned in the park rules. Because this rule is not widely known, rangers will often contact a park visitor who is flying a personal UAS and inform them of issues of flying aircraft in public spaces, including interactions with wildlife. There are some exemptions available for operation of UAS in Denver parks, including legitimate use during emergencies (fire, search and rescue, law enforcement). Contractors working for Denver, under carefully controlled situations, are sometimes allowed to use UAS.

Margo witnessed a UAS being flown at Red Rocks by a commercial UAS pilot, who was working for the rock mitigation company to examine the rock formations for any safety issues. This inspection is done multiple times per year to mitigate any safety concerns. If unstable pieces of rock are found, a crew will drop down on ropes and carefully inspect and trim away the specific parts. As we all know, Red Rocks has a very busy concert season and safety is of utmost importance to Denver Mountain Parks. This year the contractor was allowed to use a UAS to record and examine the rock faces before committing climbers to a hazardous climb. They obtained permission for this activity and a ranger was with them the entire time it was being flown around the amphitheater. Mr. Brown assured us that they were very aware of the historic presence of Peregrine Falcons nesting in the area and have been monitoring the raptor activity, along with local birders, carefully this year. If a disturbance to the peregrines is detected, the monitoring ranger will intervene with the contractor to mitigate that disturbance.

 bird on rock



UAS are a new and burgeoning technology with many known and potential legitimate uses. However, as with any fast growing technology, it should be carefully monitored and regulated for the unintended negative impacts that it may also present. Mr. Brown stated that Denver Mountain Parks is doing its best to find that balance.

If you see UAS activity or other disturbances to wildlife on your visits to Denver Mountain Parks, you can contact rangers by calling 311. Follow the prompts to reach Mountain Park rangers. Denver Mountain Parks appreciates that we, and other park visitors, can help with being the eyes and ears on what is happening in their parks.

Margo Constable and Brad Andres

