



Raptors of the Rockies

P.O. Box 250, FLORENCE, MT 59833

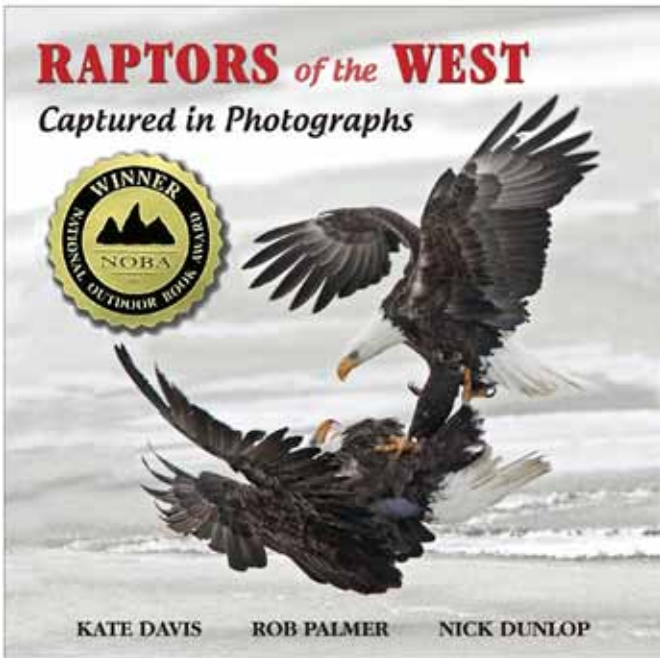
Educational Programs since 1988

Raptor Round-Up

www.raptorsoftherockies.org
See a color version of the newsletter

NUMBER 39, DECEMBER 2011

We Win the National Outdoor Book Award



photos by Rob Palmer, Bald Eagles; Nick Dunlop, Merlin; Kate Davis, Short-eared Owl ©

This is a book of action photography and it will rock your socks! The cover draws you in immediately: two bald eagles, talons spread and about to lock, one above and one below upside down, yellow eyes glaring: the tumbling, breathtaking violence of a fight over food captured in a timeless manner. Raptors is a type of book that you can read in parts when time permits. By design, there's no overarching text, rather each of the photos have instructive captions which explain the behavior pictured. Quite simply, it's among some of the best action bird photography ever published. - NOBA Reviewers



Our new book with Mountain Press Publishing took top honors for the National Outdoor Book Award, the category of Design and Artistic Merit! "The National Outdoor Book Awards (NOBA) is the outdoor world's largest and most prestigious book award program. The purpose of the Awards is to recognize and encourage outstanding writing and publishing. Each fall in early November, the NOBA Foundation announces the winners of the nine categories making up the program." Rob, Nick and I are delighted, as is Mountain Press. It was way too much fun putting that book together, and the whole time I had jazz on the stereo and Sib the Peregrine perched nearby. I always looked to her, or took a stroll out to visit the teaching team birds for inspiration when stuck for a caption idea. It's been a group effort between all of us and our publishers, and 2nd edition will feature the winner's medalian installed on the cover!

The growing legion of amateur photographers with their high hopes and new digital SLR cameras will weep when they see this remarkable collection of raptor photos. Or be inspired to become the next Kate Davis, Rob Palmer, or Nick Dunlop. The three photographers, with text by Davis, provide an extraordinary catalog of stunning raptor images from the Arctic tundra to mature forests to Great Plains grasslands. Usually a book publisher's accompanying press release is filled with hyperbole. But in this case, when Mountain Press Publishing claims, "Bird lovers will swoon," I have to agree, because I did. - Tom Dickson, Editor, Montana Outdoors Magazine Nov-Dec 2011 issue



MISSION STATEMENT

Raptors of the Rockies is a nonprofit 501(c) (3) raptor education project located in Western Montana. Active since 1988, our mission is:

- * To educate schools and the public through the use of live birds - the eagles, hawks, falcons and owls used in raptor education and wildlife art programs;
- * To provide a lifetime of quality care to permanently disabled birds of prey and falconry birds;
- * To instill a sense of respect and admiration for these skilled hunters and to promote wildlife conservation and habitat preservation for our wild bird populations.

New Teaching Team Bald Eagle

Just approved for our Eagle Exhibition permit, Sonny the Bald Eagle is officially on the teaching team. Retrieved by our friend Rob Domenech in June, the bird was standing on a riverbank at Quinn's Hot Springs for a few days. Rob actually fished him out of the river with a net when he bailed, to discover a starving bird, missing a wing tip. Like Alisa (Clancy) the Red-tail, this bird is named after a hero at KCSM Radio in San Mateo, California - Sonny Buxton. Catch his show on Saturdays and 24-hour-a-day-commercial-free jazz, streaming [live on the web](#)! Also, Sonny is named for all of the jazz musicians by that name that you can think of like Rollins, Stitt, Clarke, but this eagle is Buxton!



My first time in Boston, and one thing is for certain: I'll be back, with Tom next time, if we can figure out how to take care of the dogs and cats and birds while we are gone.

Bird Program in Boston (Okay, Medford)

I was honored to deliver the keynote for the annual Eastern Massachusetts Hawk Watch Meeting in Medford (pronounced *Medfud*) in September. Paul Roberts invited me to speak last year and at first I thought he was kidding, but it really happened. A record number of 140 raptor lovers were in attendance, record new membership sign-ups, and even a little standing ovation at the end. I presented a PowerPoint of 150 slides, images of our birds, programs, research, books, and brand new Bald Eagle nest shots, which brought some "awww's" to see squirrels living in the nest. For a finale I even had everyone hoot like a Great Horned Owl. My in-laws were even there, and I spent one day with sister-in-law Ellen touring the North Shore, Davis-land. I had another engagement Saturday at the Joppa Flats Education Center, and went birding with Paul's wife and daughter, Julie and Laura at the legendary Plum Island. My favorite place was Gloucester (pronounced *Glauwsta*.)

RRF Conference in Duluth

This year's Raptor Research Foundation Conference was in Duluth, and the first time I've ventured to Hawk Ridge Observatory above the shores of beautiful Lake Superior. 235 raptorphiles gathered for workshops, papers and presentations, with new and old contacts - one board member joked about the "geezering" of participants. But this time dozens of new students and early career researchers were in attendance, refreshing to see. Hawk Ridge is famous for huge migration flights of raptors, an average of 94,000 a year and we were not disappointed: eagles, hawks, falcons, and Ospreys with an added plus of a little surge of 30,000 American Robins Sunday morning.

Hey, raptors have to eat something. Applause to the Hawk Ridge volunteers and especially Julie O'Conner for putting this special event together, and Erik Bruhnke who entertains everyone with his astute observations of fly-by's and perfect demonstrations of how to tell the species apart. My favorite is his dead-on imitation of a Northern Harrier. You RULE! Looks like I will be the RRF Conference Chair starting in 2012. Argentina, anyone?

TOP: A youngster releases a banded Sharp-shinned at Hawk Ridge, one that her parents have adopted, a perfect fundraiser for this non-profit. BELOW: Scott Ford, Dan Varland, and Tim Pitz assist the experts at Hawk Ridge. Actually, no talking allowed, and they don't miss a bird.



Grizzly Creek Films and National Geographic Pay a Visit

We hosted a film crew for two days this fall, including one night, and the owls were the stars for an educational project for kids. Experts from Grizzly Creek Films produce a series for the Nat Geo Wild channel "Expedition Wild" and they made the trip from Bozeman with gear galore. Plus software techs from Microsoft in Seattle descended on the Raptor Ranch. They are creating a curriculum for children that explains the lives of owls, and they met our teaching team on Tuesday. Nighttime supermodels were Jillian the Great Horned and Degas the Long-eared Owl. They were filmed in the forest with infrared lights and cameras in complete darkness, aside from the moderate moonlight. We did so many takes with one owl that I asked the director if he was Stanley Kubrick (a little film joke.)



iPod the Pygmy-owl, Jillian and Degas calmly posed for more segments the following day, and Graham was filmed looking serene and lovely. Series and project host is Casey Anderson, The Bear Guy, who is fantastic and a natural for the show, which has won numerous awards including the International Wildlife Film Festival. We hope to take Casey on a little Peregrine hunt soon, if he can fit it in his hectic schedule.



I know that's not an owl, it's Nigel the eagle and two hams (Casey Anderson and Kate.)
LEFT: A November snow storm



We Lose and Gain A Family Member

Our eight year old Golden Retriever will be very much missed, and we had to have him put down in September. Rudy was best known for his daily activities at the river behind the house, rearing out of the water, barking and catching splashes in his mouth. For hours and hours. We were told that Rudy had cancer back in May, but I was in denial and had him out hunting with the falcon two days before he died. Gratitude to the kind doctors/pals Mike, Lynn and Janna at Florence Veterinary and they know what a great life this loving and eccentric dog had. I don't think he ever even slowed down or knew he was not long of this world. Rudy had a very full life of swims and hikes and hunting for which most dogs (and lots of humans) would be envious.

We are ecstatic to have Mookie us, a ten month old Black Lab that is now part of the family thanks to our friends in Hamilton, the Frederick's. She has passed all the tests: from birds on perches, cats in the house, falcon in the car, buckets of meat thawing in the house, everything that would drive a bird dog nuts. But not this one, even "hunting 'em up" with Peanut, Rudy's sister Our first experience with a Labrador, and love this one but we are finding that chewing such things as boot laces and TV remotes gives them great pleasure. Hopefully not for long but we told for another two years or so, yikes.



RIGHT: Rudy splashing
BELOW: Mookie and Sibley



Mookie learns a valuable lesson about trying to take a falcon's food away

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2011

The Baby Barn Owl of Burnt Fork

Mistaken identity is common in the bird world. Jay and I have been told about cliffs with Peregrines only to find Prairie Falcons, a common error. Once a friend found a "baby Osprey" floating in the Clark Fork River on a canoe trip that turned out to be a pigeon. Kind of a stretch. But today was a new experience when I drove to Stevensville to see a "fluffy baby Barn Owl, sitting in my pear tree for days and days." Barn Owls a super-rare around here, and I thought it might be a branching Great Horned. She told me that he had dark black eyes with a yellow beak. Well, must be a Barred Owl and well worth a look. So the dogs and I took a drive, met the woman and walked to her pear tree. "Ta-da! There he is!" she pointed. A bird nest. Probably a pewee nest and covered with cottonwood fluff. Now that's a first. Another reason to have an unlisted phone number.



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2011

Finally a Merlin

One bird I had set in my sights, or camera to be exact, is the Northern Pygmy-Owl, ever since I missed photographing one at the MPG Ranch across the road because all I had was a wide angle lens. One photo did end up in the new book, but never have gotten any close shots. My luck continued yesterday when one ended up in the MPG mist net at the banding station, after an entangled nuthatch that must have looked irresistible. I showed up ten minutes after he was photographed by the crew and released, oh well. He'll still be up there somewhere and I'll try to whistle him in. The other species I am after this fall is the Merlin, and scored on the way home when this bird was plucking a bird on a fence post. This magpie was after the prize, which looked like the remains of a bluebird. The little falcon outmaneuvered the kleptoparasite and finished the meal on a power pole farther down the road. Identification by our Merlin expert friend Bruce Haak: female Richardson's (Prairie.)



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2011

Sula With Steve

Today about 20 Audubonners had a splendid day in the Bitterroots on top of Sula Peak waiting for the hawks to fly in migration with our state director Steve Hoffman in tow. I say waiting because not many raptors showed up, despite great predictions according to wind and weather. But I guarantee not one person left with a complaint as we had a ball! Kate Stone organized this field trip and Steve installed this plastic owl decoy to attract birds, the photo as a big storm crossed the valley. This is the same place I took the shot that I used for the poster for the 2010 Bird Fest, if it looks familiar. Dick Hutto was telling me when to hit the shutter for lightning, me looking through the viewfinder, but missed them all. With two Kates running the show today, it was a bit confusing shouting observations, but apparently I am Big Kate, assuming it was meant by by age. HA!

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2011

Eagles Again

The big day of 11/11/11 and I spaced out bringing my tripod to go photograph the Bald Eagles with the new 500 mm lens. Nope, nothing in the car and accidentally left it at home, bummer. So I fashioned a tripod out of a forked stick found on the beach, just like the folks on Gilligan's Island or maybe the Flintstones would do. Right away I found both adults lounging, one in a cottonwood and the other I spotted way up river in a Ponderosa Pine. About one hundred images later, Bald Eagle behavior captured, I promised that next time I won't forget that essential piece of gear. Kind of shaky, shooting with a stick in the sand and all that glass balancing on top.



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2011

On Stage with the Chickadee Symphony

Last night I joined Erick Greene, conductor James Smart, and 50 members of the U of M Symphonic Wind Ensemble for a concert in the University Theater. Dr. Craig Naylor is a "biologist-turned-composer" who created a remarkable piece called the "Chickadee Symphony" based on the vocalizations of the little songbirds and subjects of a study we did that was published in Science in 2005. Erick showed the sonograms and photos in a Powerpoint and the musicians played the chickadee parts. We joined him with Jillian the Great Horned Owl and iPod the Pygmy (to a theater of "ahhhs!") and a little discussion of these mighty predators and Danger! The symphony in four parts begins with the Dawn Chorus and finishes with the jazzy Chickadee Dance, the music mimicking life in a flock of chickadees in the forest. What a treat, and I never thought I'd be standing on the same stage where I saw Pearl Jam play 25 years ago, with raptors and music.



WEDNESDAY,
NOVEMBER 16, 2011

Coyote Choir Kids

Here was Tuesday night, thanks to an invitation from Amy Martin, ringmaster for the talents of the Coyote Choir, the singing group of kids from the Missoula area and recording stars. We met at the Missoula Children's Theatre with Jillian the Great Horned Owl to explore ideas about partnering for a musical project, and creative juices were flowing. When asked what I envisioned, I told them it would be an appearance on Leno or Letterman, and they had no idea what I was talking about. These guys don't watch TV, at least not that late at night. Jillian and I were treated to a wonderful performance of their original song "What Kind of Animal Are You?" that included echidnas sticking out their tongues. Look that one up in your field guide to Australian monotremes...



New Project For Stackpole

My next project has been picked up by Stackpole Books in Pennsylvania. The new book will feature the Bald Eagle Family of Western Montana, with about 120 photos of the nest, neighborhood resident animals, parent eagles and the four babies growing up and fledging. I have laid out the project using InDesign, as I did with the last book but with a different trim size, and now working on the captions. Stackpole wanted a photography book like the last, and are happy to learn of the new award.

After a little introduction, we'll launch into the saga of the polite young, taking turns to be fed everything from pigeons and goslings to squirrels and of course, deer. That story went worldwide on the internet when one of the adults dropped an eviscerated fawn on powerlines which swung over and shorted out electricity to East Missoula in June; "Deer With Wings," claimed dozens of stories, but just our diligent parents. NorthWestern Energy lineman Ryan Gibbs has supplied a great photo of the fawn suspended in the air, and great tale for that part! Then the post-fledging stories and lots of flying eagle shots, with my favorites being the attacks by mobbing Bullock's Orioles. We'll keep you posted and should be a colorful and interesting book. I never knew I would grow to admire Bald Eagles this much, and hopefully the readers will too.

Kate Davis photos ©



New Saw-whet Owl

Our new Northern Saw-whet Owl came from Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge, discovered by the side of a hiking trail, unable to fly. Refuge personnel delivered her to rehabilitator Judy Hoy of Stevensville and her examination revealed a wing break in the deep tissue of the shoulder and non-releasable. So the permit amendment came through from the Federal Fish and Wildlife service, and voila: now a Raptor of the Rockies. Buster the Saw-whet lived to be twelve years old, not a world record but close. He was always a program favorite, dazzling tens of thousands of people over the years. This one is also very calm and loves her little mice. We thought of another well-behaved little girl, and named her Maya, after our ten-year-old friend Maya Heffernan. She has been friend since she was a little nestling, like her brothers Sam and Paul, and Paul has fledged and is off in college.



Alarm Call Study with Erick Greene and Cornell Labs

This is research and exciting stuff! As a continuation of our study that was published in *Science* in 2005, we reported that predators of different sizes elicit different responses in prey species, specifically chickadees that we studied in aviaries. Now we are using our raptors in wild settings and near bird feeders, perched and recording the alarm calls of birds with high resolution microphones supplied by the Cornell Laboratories of Ornithology. Their Macaulay Library of natural sounds has about 175,000 recordings of bird vocalizations: fewer than a dozen of these are alarm calls for which the predator or threat was known.

As proven before, smaller predators pose a real threat to small birds, as they are more maneuverable and catch them routinely. Pygmy-Owls cause chickadees to freak; the "dee" alarm calls are louder and by the dozen. But but they couldn't care less if a Great Horned Owl was discovered in their territory, as a larger bird would have a hard time catching one of them and really wouldn't bother. Now we are finding the same panic attacks by these wild birds to small predators, but not the big raptors like the Red-tailed Hawk. Instead we got scolds from Red Squirrels and a stealthy theft of peanuts at the feeder by Steller's Jays. These are all amazing behaviors and now captured by Erick and his three students at U of M. And for fear of having our smaller birds attacked while perched, I came up with this welded cage of sorts, covered with netting for protection against wild hawks.

Next, we big plans to fly raptors through terrain and record calls with a series of up to 24 microphones. It turns out that many species of birds and mammals have very sophisticated and subtle "distant early warning systems" of alerting each other about the presence of raptors. These alarm "seet" calls travel through the habitat faster than a hawk can fly. Erick wonders just how fast these waves of information spread and how long the prey species continue signally and remain on heightened alert. This is a three year study and will certainly bring some mysteries about communication to light! I see another paper in *Science* in the future.



TOP: Our best percher, calm for 20 minutes, and such a surprise - Margo the Sharp-shinned Hawk is perfect, with the bird feeder behind.
 ABOVE: Erick installs our ingenious danger-free perch and iPod the Pygmy-Owl.



Kate Davis photos ©



Mr. 3-D microphone

MPG Ranch of Florence



Immature Cooper's Hawk and Sharp-shin fly by the observation station.

The 8500 acre MPG Ranch across the river in the Sapphires has proven to be a raptor mecca. They promote conservation through restoration, research, education, and information sharing. The diligent hawkwatchers at MPG counted over 2155 migrants, the largest numbers being "kettles" of Red-tailed Hawks, 776 in all and nearly 400 Sharp-shinned Hawks. They even saw 6 Broad-winged Hawks, plus favorites, 84 Golden Eagles. Raptor View Research Institute lent a hand, and trapped and banded a number of the birds of prey passing by. Amazingly, over 500 Northern Saw-whet Owls were trapped and banded by the night time crew, telemetry attached to several and tracked. They are very excited for 2012 and the future!



PRINTS AVAILABLE

Prints (framed or unframed) and cards (also at Rockin'Rudy's) are available, so contact Kate at raptors@montana.com

Adopt a Raptor For a Holiday Gift



Teaching Team:

Golden Eagles	Max ~ \$ 1000
	Nigel ~ \$ 500
Bald Eagle	Sonny ~ \$300
Rough-legged Hawk	Otto ~ \$ 200
Swainson's Hawk	Evita ~ \$ 200
Red-tailed Hawk	Alisa ~ \$ 150
Harris's Hawk	Deja ~ \$ 200
Harris's Hawk	Chesty ~ \$ 150
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Margo ~ \$ 100
American Kestrel	JayDub ~ \$ 75
Peregrine Falcon	Sibley ~ \$ 400
Gyr/Peregrine hybrid	Ansel ~ \$ 250
Northern Pygmy-Owl	iPod ~ \$ 50
Northern Saw-whet Owl	Maya ~ \$ 75
Long-eared Owl	Degas ~ \$ 100
Barred Owl	Graham ~ \$ 300
Great Horned Owls	Jillian ~ \$ 150
	Miles ~ \$ 250

Suggested adoption rates, and receive a matted photo of your bird and tax-deduction receipt, plus be listed on our web site and next newsletter. Thanks adoptive parents for your support!

Raptors of the West: Captured in Photographs

P.O. Box 250 Florence, MT 59833
raptors@montana.com www.raptorsoftherockies.org

Name _____

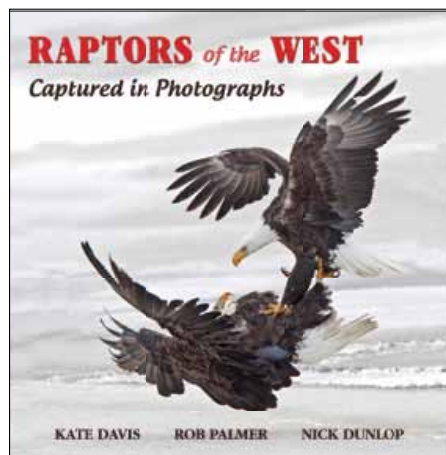
Address _____

Autographed copies of *Raptors of the West* at \$30.00 each plus \$5 shipping and handling

Number of copies _____

TOTAL \$ _____

Please make checks payable to Kate Davis



250 pages
430 color photos
45 species

Portion of proceeds goes to Raptors of the Rockies educational program 20%!

An autographed copy of our book and an easy-to-fill-out order form!

YES, I want to sponsor the Raptors of the Rockies with this tax-deductible contribution:

Name _____

Address _____

Contribution amount or Adopted Raptor _____

Thank you Raptor Backers!

sponsors since our last newsletter

Tom Davis
Sally Phillips
Steve and Mindy Palmer
H & H Meats
Larry Weeks
Judy Hoy
McLaughlin Research Institute
U of M Laboratory Animal Resources
Florence Veterinary Clinic
Hamilton Packing
Cinnabar Foundation
Jan and Bill McIlroy
Eastern Massachusetts Hawk Watch
Richard S. Griffith
Francis and Naomi DeNeve
Jerome Miller
Chris and Dick Everett
Philomene Ducas
Marcia Prather and Mark Sampson
John and Marna Abbott, Abbott's Glass
Grizzly Creek Films
Paul Loehnen
Jay and Janna Sumner
Kate Stone

Kate Davis photos ©



Jay Sumner's Peregrine, Sandra cruising the Blackfoot



The Bald Eagle nest shot will be in the 2012 Peregrine Fund Calendar. Order one today from the P Fund!
www.peregrinefund.org

Board of Directors

Kate Davis - Executive Director
Deborah Richie - Secretary
Kathy Heffernan
John Heffernan
Dale Manning

Welcome back Deborah! We missed you.

Raptors of the Rockies

P.O. Box 250, Florence, MT 59833

raptors@montana.com

www.raptorsoftherockies.org

www.raptorsoftherockies.com

<http://raptorsoftherockies.blogspot.com>



Raptors of the Rockies

Educational Programs since 1988

