

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
www.raptorsoftherockies.com
Photography and book web site

NUMBER 42, NOVEMBER 2012



photos by Keith Fialcowitz ©

Celebrating 25 years with Our Birds



Chesty the Harris's Hawk cruises the yard, Sapphire Mountains as backdrop. This spring will make 12 years in Bitterroot, the happiest of moves to an all-new Raptor Ranch on the river. Teaching Team birds range from twenty-three year old Max the Golden Eagle to Degas, the Long-eared Owl that is two. (story page 2)

Show at The Holter Museum of Arts

The Nature Conservancy is hosting a show at the Holter Museum in Helena starting in January, *Montana's Living Landscapes: A Photographic Essay*. Eight photographers have been invited, and I'll have about 20 raptor shots in the show (and bare walls in our house for a few months!) I'm trying to decide if I should include some "regular" birds as well. This show coincides with their Ansel Adams Exhibition, my photographer Dad's hero, and he would be cheering. Over 130 Adams originals will be on display.

Curator of Art Yvonne Seng saw my new metal sculpture and asked if it could be included. "I'm planning the gallery around him."

January 18 - April 14th 2013

The Sherman Gallery



5 1/2 foot Gyrfalcon, 18 gauge steel and brass eyes, in our living room now so he, or she, won't rust.

Cover Girls

Big press! *Montanan* magazine is mailed to all University of Montana alumni, donors and staff, three issues a year. It has the largest circulation of any magazine in the state, 98,000 copies printed. Editor John Heaney called this spring to see if I was interested in being featured, as he had seen our Raptors book and earlier story about the Chickadee Symphony. He wanted to have our long-time pal, writer Ginny Merriam do the profile, and what a great job! We even had the cover with photos by Keith Fialcowitz, taken at the MPG Ranch last winter. The story also included some of my photos and those of Todd Goodrich, and we are very proud indeed.

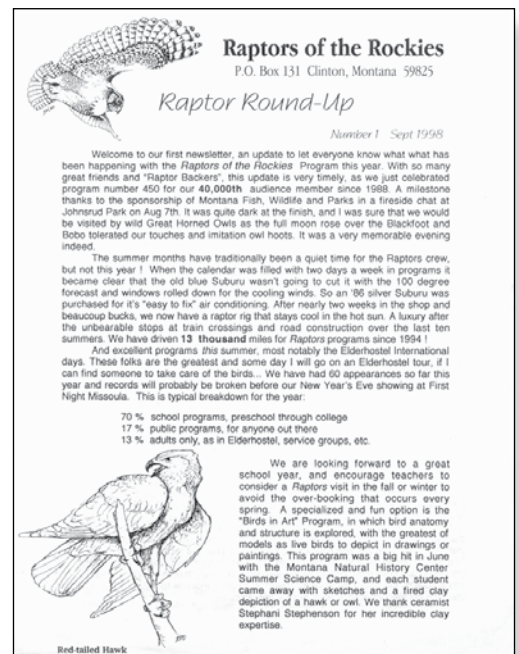


MISSION STATEMENT

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.

There it is, our first Raptor Round-Up that starts out "Welcome to our first newsletter." I wonder how large the mailing list was in 1989? Just drawings back then, before I was a "picture-taker" and cut and paste was with scissors and tape. It was Webmaster Steve Palmer who asked if I had a digital camera and a web site, for which I answered, "Huh?" That was back in 1999 and we have come a long way. Steve still makes fun of my printing and mailing hundreds of copies of the Round-Up, calling it totally 20th century. Yes, old-fashioned!



Raptors of the Rockies Turns 25... Thanks to YOU!



Almost half a lifetime ago, Raptors of the Rockies began at a rental property in Clinton, old hog barns remodelled to hold hawks. I got my required federal and state permits, rehabilitator Judy Hoy showed me some basics, and I brought raptor food home from my job at the taxidermy shop. We started out with a few dozen programs a year with the record in 2003 at 82 for 8000 people. That's 1400 appearances and for every single one we ask the audience, young and old, to go hoot up an owl.

Another common thread is the support we have enjoyed over the last 25 years, Raptor Backers from all walks of life and from all over the country. Schools have penny collections, people Adopt a Raptor as a gift, and one boy played his violin at Farmers Market for donations. Heroes by the hundreds have made this all possible.

Highlights are also in the hundreds, tops being hosting the Raptor Research Foundation Conference in 2008, programs in Boston and Chicago, winning the National Outdoor and Montana Book Awards, and flying falcons with Jay Sumner.

I'm not sure about *another* 25 years, but we'll give it a try.



TOP LEFT: A photo taken about 20-something years ago by my brother, and I'm releasing an owl that was starved, found eating earthworms in a neighbor's garden. Hit by a car and sprayed by a skunk, he weighed about a pound and was fattened up on mice from our favorite lab.

ABOVE: Clive the Red-tail, our first bird. He, I mean she, laid a few eggs so a little mistake, and not the only time I've gotten the sex wrong. Eggs are an indicator.

LEFT: Our other original Teaching Team member, Bobo, who was named after a friend who used to sleep all day. Bobo was killed by a wild owl right through the kennel wire in his building in Florence.

Harriers on the Hill

We are lucky to have a nice hunting ground six miles away, up on a sagebrush hill across the river, and much thanks to James Mollander. We've been up there for years, chasing Gray Partridge (formally called Hungarian Partridge) with our Peregrine (formally called a Duck Hawk.) Partridge coveys have explosive takeoffs and that always makes me scream out loud, startled by the sudden action. This day, we were also joined by five Northern Harriers (formally called Marsh Hawks, and just keeping current.) They were hunting the huge numbers of voles running through the brush and one hawk had a little encounter with Sib. I have only seen these two species get aggressive once when Sib knocked down a duck. Otherwise, it's almost as if they are playing. And wouldn't you know, the minute Sib perched on that pole, up went that covey and I did scream, but I won't tell you what I shouted.



Two Days with the Bret and the BBC

Last year we were thrilled to be involved in a scientific study (and fun project) with the University of Montana Flight Lab, headed by Brandon Jackson and Dr. Bret Tobalski and their famous Tower of Power. They are interested in upward flight, and have a two story tower with collapsible walls. Different-sized birds make the trip straight up, recorded with high-speed cameras and so far the largest bird to date has been Sibley the Peregrine. She did two trips to the top in March 2011, and that film caught the attention of the BBC, who requested a trip to record the flight with a high definition camera at 1500 frames per second, the Phantom.

I told the BBC that Sib might be good for two or three trips, and that the flight/hunt sequence would have to be the next day. After all, food is the motivation. So we arrived at the flight lab, three cameras set up and all eyes on the star. Up the stairs I ran and nervously reached over into the top of the Tower to call the falcon to a tidbit of quail on my glove. After a slight hesitation, up she came- perfect. And again and again, with no hesitation and by the 7th and 8th flight, she was waiting for me on a chair at the top! Way beyond my expectations and I'll bet she could have gone another 8 times but I ran out of food. And got tired running up those stairs...

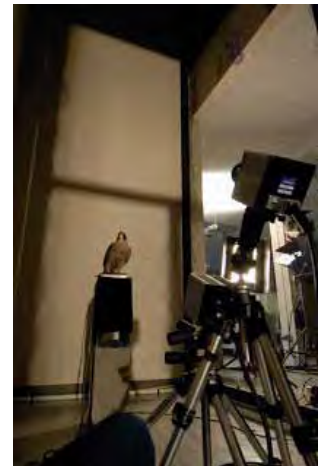
The next day were the free-flying shots, and I just hoped they could follow her with that huge camera. At the end she was joined by a wild Merlin and caught a partridge, knocking it from the sky. I now know what I want for Christmas: a Phantom HD Gold and Sachtler 5590 Speed-lock tripod, okay? We'll let you all know when this show airs on the Discovery Channel - prime time! In the meantime, you can see Bret's short videos on our Blog Page, Monday October 8th, and on our YouTube Channel.

And at every PowerPoint since then and forever, premiering at the Festival of the Book and recently in Seeley Lake. You gotta see this!



Dr. Tobalski reviews his films, taken with cameras recording 300 frames per second.

Kate Davis photos ©



Sib in the Tower, ready to go straight up two stories like a pro.



The camera and sound crew in for a close-up after the falcon caught a partridge. "Quiet on the set so we can hear the crunching bits." Thanks again to the MPG Ranch for the beautiful backdrop. Brilliant, as they say in the UK.



FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2012

Back from The Front

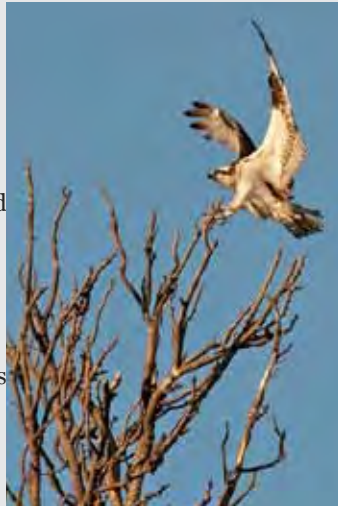
We made the trek back to the Rocky Mountain Front and had a few days of fun with The Nature Conservancy's Women's Week at Pine Butte Guest Ranch. Sib, Alisa, Jillian and Owen the Owl were stars for the program just before social hour, a PowerPoint the next morning, then hunt with the falcon. That was a bit nerve-racking in planning, but came off without a hitch as the women marched through the wide open country in search of game birds. To my surprise, we scared up a huge white-tailed jackrabbit that Sibley stooped on repeatedly, just in play I imagine, but I think our audience was split down the middle, half rooting for the rabbit. Thanks to the ladies for your generosity, and Jeff, Nikki and Kat for a trip I'll never forget.



THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2012

Farewell to the Fish Hawk

A constant sight around here since April, all of the Ospreys will be gone very soon, and just got this shot at the river. Perhaps it's a northern bird just passing through on his way to the southern hemisphere, or maybe a resident bird lingering. The two fledglings could be seen for weeks in high soars with their parents, or in chase after a fish dangling from dad's talons. Adult birds leave sooner and head to the tropics, often flying over open water and feeding along the way. The young finally depart, even though the fishing is still fine around here, as they have a long migration ahead. A tough life, with the strict live fish diet and flying time to wintering grounds, so most Ospreys die that first year, perhaps as many as 70 %. Maybe their only little break, the young birds stay in the tropics for their first year and only come back when they are two years of age. Where do "our" birds go exactly? We'll know soon enough as Rob Domenech and Raptor View Research Institute have fitted several adults and young with satellite transmitters, and we'll keep you posted. In the meantime, say goodbye to the birds biologist Alan Poole says leave the frigid north, "to pursue an endless summer."



WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2012

One Omelet Coming Right Up

Just kidding. We don't eat these eggs, but Chesty the 22 year old Harris's Hawk doesn't trust me. She laid these eggs a few weeks ago, and has been "incubating" on and off. When she goes for her daily fly around the yard, she goes back to her building after about 20 minutes to check on her eggs. No male, infertile, won't hatch, no babies....I have had to explain that *ad nauseam* to friends that visit. One year Sibley the Peregrine laid nine eggs!



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2012

What Month Is It?

This shot from just after 4 p.m. today, our house and the Bitterroot Mountains in the backdrop. Fires still rage, despite cold nights, short days and heroic work by wildland firefighters. We have the distinction of a record setting drought, with 49 days without precipitation here, and rains scheduled for tomorrow. Thank you very much, Mother Nature. The last photo I got like this was in August, not October 12th!



WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2012

UFO? No: Lenticular Cloud

This photograph was taken moments ago and everyone in the Bitterroot must have noticed this giant lenticular cloud, hovering over the valley. Lenticular meaning "lens-shaped." The smoke is finally gone with over an inch of rain on Monday night and a glorious autumn day. And thanks to Jan Burgess and the kids at Lone Rock School for a great program today and me going on and on. And on and on...Degas the Long-eared Owl was one of the heroes.



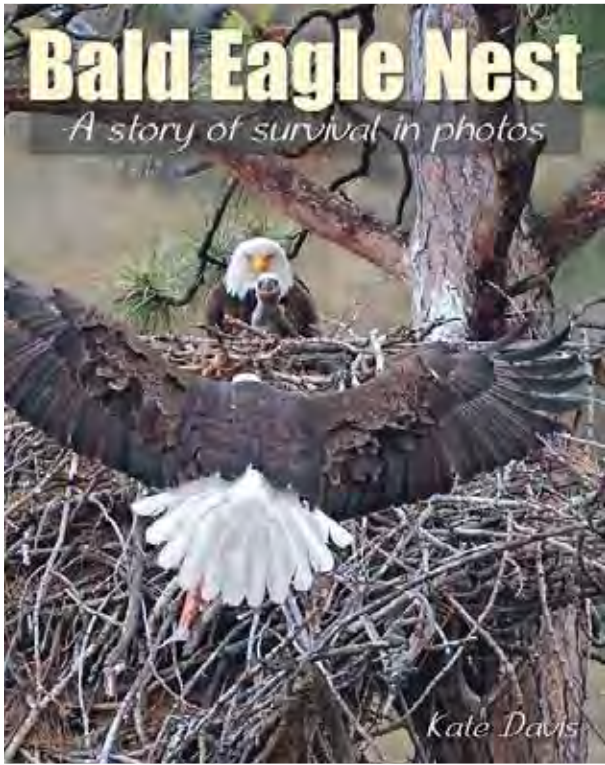
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2012

Grizzly Claw Trading Company

We'd like to think that the happenin' spot for Seeley Lake on Saturday night was the

Grizzly Claw. Along with Alpine Artistry, they hosted the Open Book Club, packing them into their rustic shop downtown with Mom at the center of this photo. I just don't know how I did it, but with the PowerPoint and Sibley and Jillian, I spoke for an hour and a half (HA!) We spent a wonderful night in a cabin by the Lake courtesy The Lodges, and then Sunday a falconry demonstration. Sibley was the greatest, and came in on a stoop to the lure...when she was darned good and ready. They have invited us back when the Bald Eagle book comes out, but will probably wait till next fall so we can bring Sibley for another fly.





New Book out in January
 We'll have copies in the car! Speaking of which, I bought another Subaru, a green 2003 just like the last one but with fewer miles. And sunroof and CD player that works. Now just have to install the SnowBowl and Ducks Unlimited stickers on the back.



Now there's something you don't see every day—a Southwest desert hawk flying in the snow. Chesty the Harris's Hawk doesn't mind it a bit and returned to her building and heat lamp after an hour for a nice squirrel leg. Meteorologist Bryan Henry reports: "This character-building storm should give us a proper introduction to winter..."



Butcher Watchman

Question: What songbird is most like a falcon?

Answer: The Northern Shrike. This one was perched in the yard in November, a quick shot before it took off toward the mountains like a little Peregrine. The Cornell Laboratory BNA account by Tom Cade describes them perfectly: "the Northern Shrike appears innocuous and non-predatory. Often tame and unsuspecting, it sometimes sings a feeble though pleasing and rhythmical song, even in winter, utterly belying its true nature, which it reveals the instant a mouse or small bird moves within its range of attack." Their scientific name *Lanius excubitor* means "butcher watchman," a great name for a scary movie. And check out that falcon-like beak, made for cracking vertebrae of birds and mammals which are often impaled on thorns and barbed wire for "butchering." What a bird!



Best Wishes
 for 2013 from
 all of us



By the way, from the last newsletter: The photo of the Bald Eagle standing on the bluebird box, advertising Bald Eagle Nest boxes from Raptors of the Rockies was a joke. They really don't nest in tiny boxes. How would they fit in that little hole?

Our Back Yard



Kate Davis photos ©

A Great Gray Owl in the Bighole Valley.

For a while there, we could have been called the Eagle Empire! For two weeks we were housing four eagles bound for Oklahoma, picked up folks from the Potawatami Nation Eagle Aviary in August. Plus we had our three eagles, and three wayward fledgling Balds from the nest across the river hanging out day and night. That made 3 Golden and 7 Balds, all screaming at once. The three young birds left the nest in early July and practically lived in our yard, on the fence and standing on top of the 40 foot eagle enclosure wondering how to get in there and dine on some nice squirrel. They were very approachable, maybe from seeing me and the camera and dogs all the time. One morning a *fourth* fledgling joined them on the eagle building and wonder where he came from?

By the end of August, the young were nowhere to be found, but the adults are always around, to this day, and often perched over the nest now covered with snow. Quite handy having a Bald Eagle nest you can watch through a scope in the living room.

Flathead Monsters

My buddy Barry Gordon documented some amazing Osprey behavior this summer right in his front yard - which happens to be Flathead Lake. Ospreys built a nest on a platform he installed by the dock at his cabin on Wildhorse Island. This was the first year for this pair and a very late start, with only one chick.

A nearby Osprey nest had failed and that female would drop by and try to land in Barry's nest, with huge fights between the big girls.

The male often brought in Kokanee Salmon, not found in Flathead but only in distant lakes, which was quite interesting. Barry's birds are very territorial and they both chased any Bald Eagle that came into sight. That might be what happened to the male, as he disappeared mid-breeding season, prey to an eagle or some other tragedy.

Not able to watch the female struggle with feeding the young, Barry to the rescue and he took over the fishing duties, out in his boat for hours. Whatever he caught would get a blast from the air compressor so it floated (very clever) and the female Osprey learned in no time that Barry was the breadwinner. With a whistle, she would perk up and retrieve fish tossed off the dock to bring to the youngster.

One day he picked up a little gift from Harraman Trout Farm in Mission - 35 rainbows that he kept on ice in coolers all over the cabin. One other bit of odd behavior, the male from that nearby nest actually made a few fish deliveries to the chick, just dropping a fish in a fly-by.

"What an incredible summer," he confesses, and these birds were his family until September 28th when the female left, the fledgling two days later. I picture Barry perched in his observation deck, documenting the whole thing with his Nikon D300, and we hope the Fish Hawks will be back, a new male for next summer.

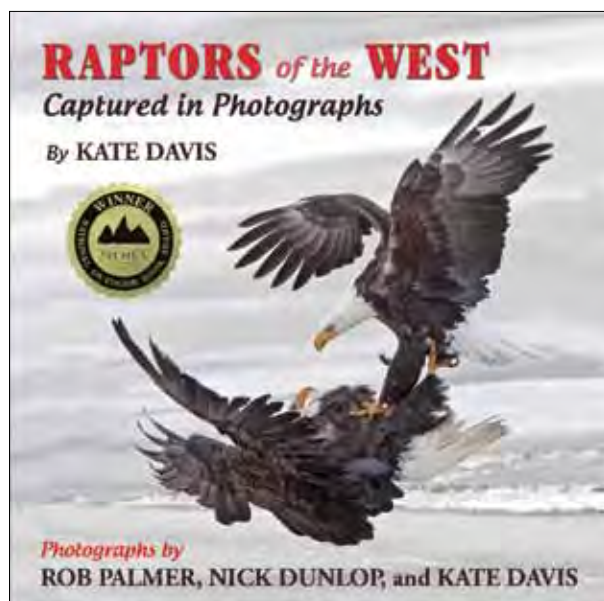


Barry Gordon photos ©

Adopt a Raptor, Buy a Book For the Holidays

Your generosity helps us with:

- Food Purchases
- Enclosure Maintenance
- Daily Care, 365 days a year
- Program Insurance
- Travel
- Web Site, Blog Page
- Telephone, Postage
- Freezer Space
- Office
- and Newsletters



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 |
| N. Saw-whet Owl | Owen ~ \$50 |
| Long-eared Owl | Degas ~ \$100 |
| Barred Owl | Graham ~ \$300 |
| Great Horned Owls | Jillian ~ \$150 |
| | Miles ~ \$250 |

WINNER! National Outdoor Book Award
WINNER! Montana Book of the Year Award



A portion of the proceeds helps to fund our program



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!

Pages: 250 **Size:** 10 x 9 5/8 **Price:** \$30/\$35 with shipping
Species: 45 **Photographs:** 430

Contact: Kate Davis raptors@montana.com
 P.O. Box 265
 Florence, MT 59833

Autographed copy & checks written to Kate Davis, thank-you!

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

Name _____

Address _____

Contribution amount or Adopted Raptor _____

Thank you Raptor Backers!

sponsors since our last newsletter

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The Pleiades Foundation

Prints Available for the Holidays



Kate Davis photos ©



Degas the Long-eared Owl in the first snow of the year.

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