



**Raptors of the Rockies**  
 P.O. BOX 250, FLORENCE, MT 59833  
*Celebrating our 28th year of education*

# Raptor Round-Up

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 Photography and Book web site

**NUMBER 48, JULY 2015**

## Always Have Your Camera Handy

Here is the question I have been asked repeatedly, "How many Bald Eagle pictures do you need?" Apparently about 2800 so far since I started photographing these eagles and their nest behind the house, first shots in January.



Kate Davis photos ©

I keep a number of cameras on the couch in my office, heaven forbid someone should want to sit down. Different lenses but all set on 2500th of a second which seems to be the best shutter speed for capturing flight. I can dash out the door if something interesting is going on in the yard, like a goshawk or shrike flying by. And I'm always looking out the windows, distractions galore. I also have a spare camera for the car and pocket version in the falconry and photography vests. So that's been the project lately, getting action photos during this great breeding season. Besides printing cards, framed prints, and posting on the Blog and Facebook, I have an unique new book idea in the works - another with our pals at Mountain Press Publishing, and on the horizon.



## Banner Year for Peregrines

The season is winding down for Peregrine Falcon population monitoring, and a big year. This is the "productivity" stage when we conduct ledge counts (or as a friend thought I was saying *lech* counts) of youngsters still in the nest. Fledge counts are of brown babies flying around the cliff, chasing their parents and each other. It's a very big year for Montana Peregrine Institute Director Jay Sumner, as this is the final year for formal US Fish & Wildlife surveys. Data has been collected for 16 years, shared with all the agencies and indicating a full recovery from endangered status. The best news is they found 18 new Peregrine territories, mostly cliffs Jay was been checking all along but several surprises as well.



Numbers are off the charts - nearly 200 Peregrine nests in the state that we know of, and certainly two or three times that number were it possible to monitor all of the back country cliffs. This is up from zero Peregrines in 1983, the first known nest in 1984 in Red Rock Lakes NWR. Jay also reports that chicks are fledging nearly two weeks earlier than in the past, and we'll see if this trend continues. As far as checking out nests, "Peregrine Watch" with MPI will continue on and Jay will keep looking for new territories, and find them. It's always a thrilling discovery with lots of clapping and shouting.

Female Pileated Woodpecker and fledgling Great Horned Owl, Peregrine carrying a coot, Peregrine nest up the Blackfoot

## 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.



Kate Davis photo ©

Bighorn Sheep rams on Wildhorse Island in early May, with millions of Arrowleaf Balsamroots in bloom. What a sight to behold and will never forget it. Thanks to Barry Gordon for his hospitality at the cabin!

## HawkWatch International

Our pal Joseph Dane invited me to Utah in May for the Great Salt Lake Birding Festival, and what a blast. He sent out hundreds of these cards to the right, and on the back is written, "Join us for a fun *klee klee kle-evening* with the HWI staff and friend Kate Davis as we celebrate the release of her new book *American Kestrel: Pint-sized Predator*."

I promised Joseph all new kestrel photos for my PowerPoint. Easy, I thought back in the winter when I was first invited. Then I couldn't find any kestrels in the weeks leading up to the program. I got a few at an old nest from the book but struck it rich right before departure for Utah, just by the skin of my teeth as they say. A pair of kestrels were hamming it up on the beach when they were joined by Mr. Big. (see sequence on opposite page.) The only thing the audience saw on the first slide was the male kestrel perched in the treetop, and about 10 inches of a wing on the far right. INCOMING! And a great reaction as until then there was no mention of my nightly forays to the eagle nest. I found out much later that the kestrels' nest is 30 yards from this tree, so the tables turned and falcons are now on the offensive.

I was thrilled to visit with the HawkWatch staff and meet the board of directors, a wonderful event and hope to make it back for some hawk-watching. I signed a lot of books, and bookmarks for all our friends.



ABOVE LEFT: is Dave Oleyar and my favorite slide in the background: "Darth Kestrel: My Life Battling Voles for the Empire."

ABOVE: *Scrumptious* dinner, drinks, live acoustic blues band, and a few live kestrels from the HWI educational program and a local falconer.

LEFT: "American Kestrel/American Eagle" was accepted in the Raptors at Risk Exhibition at The Peregrine Fund.

# Great Salt Lake Bird Fest

The second day in Salt Lake, Shawn Hawks of HawkWatch (pictured below to the left) and I conducted a field trip to check kestrel nest boxes at Antelope Island State Park in the Great Salt Lake, Utah. The rain hampered the kestrel sightings a bit, but check this out - the circles are owl nests in a hay shelter. Left is a Barn Owl and right, a Great Horned, both with chicks! The arrow is the adult Great Horned and the female and "branching" nestlings standing on the nest box. Question: What do Great Horned Owls eat? Answer: Everything and one would think, Barn Owls but here they all are "living in harmony" for now at least. I would never believe it had I not seen it myself. However, I don't know the fate of the Barn Owls, if their neighbors made a meal of them when they grew larger. Hope not.

After the field trip we returned to the Bird Festival for the kids' duck stamp competition. The emcee and judge was David Sibley (bottom right) of field guide fame. This was the first spring in 9 years that we didn't meet up on the Rocky Mountain Front for a program and great to see him. Along with legendary Jerry Ligouri (*Hawks From Every Angle*) we finished with a book signing. Needless to say, one line stretched out the door, arm loads of tattered and beat up Sibley Guide to Birds along with new copies of the second edition to be treasured forever, all to be autographed by the Master himself. It was an honor to sit with these two gentlemen giants in the field of birds.



The "all-new" kestrel shots for the PowerPoint, each image a separate slide. The snag is across the Bitterroot River 100 yards from my spot. It was great light and shooting a 500 mm lens with a 1.4 teleconverter so 700 mm on a Nikon D800 and Manfrotto video head tripod. And two dogs, a bag of sunflower seeds and other refreshments, every evening behind the house. A seven minute walk.



Don't Forget to watch my TEDx Talk, "Communication In the Dark" with Jillian the owl.  
YouTube at [tedxumontana](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

## ✦ Upcoming Public Raptor Programs:

**Friday, October 2 Bridger Raptor Festival:** Bozeman will be the Raptor Capital of the West first week in October. Raptors of the Rockies program is the keynote Friday evening, 7 pm at the Museum of the Rockies. We'll start with a PowerPoint then four live birds including Nigel the Golden Eagle. [www.bridgerraptorfest.org](http://www.bridgerraptorfest.org)

**Saturday, October 3 Bridger HawkWatch:** We'll have a little program at the Bridger Ski Area event site on Saturday at 11 am. Lots to see with the Raptor Conservation Center and Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center folks present as well, hawks on hand and displays galore. You have to see the Golden Eagle migration while you are there, the highest numbers in the lower 48.

FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 2015

## Porcupine Tree

I spotted this guy from a half mile away, and got a few shots just before dark. Kerry Foresman writes in his excellent book *Mammals of Montana* that the unique quills can be three inches long, number in excess of 30,000 over the body, and damaged ones are replaced in a yearly molt. Just one baby is born after a 210-day gestation period, and it is climbing right away, eyes open and quills hardening. Mating must be done very carefully, I am guessing. Pretty cool for a rodent.



SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 2015

## Quick Trip

Barry Gordon and I beat a hasty retreat from Missoula yesterday and drove/boated to his cabin at Flathead Lake on Wildhorse Island. He was doing a quick check on things, making sure no porcupines (or vandals) had broken in over the winter and all was perfect. And, there waiting for us was "his" Osprey in the nest. Apparently it WAS her because when he whistled from the dock over she came! Hallelujah and a long, long journey from the wintering grounds to the same summer haunts year after year. I'm heading back very soon, with more time to get some shots when the male shows up. Or a new male, which may also be obvious if he doesn't respond to Barry's whistle. You can learn more about this nest on our Blog from last August. Exciting times.



Wednesday, May 6, 2015

## Jubilation

I finally located a kestrel nest, one of those that was featured in the new book but vacant last year. It's easy - across the highway at a friend Gary's house, in an old broken-off cottonwood snag bordering a horse corral. Today was the first I've seen the birds, and a joy to behold. And just my luck, as I was packing the camera back in the car, a pair of Canada Geese flew in and one landed in the depression in the top of the snag which scared the female kestrel out of the cavity below. She immediately flew back and chased the giant sissy honker away! Missed it with the camera, but saw it with my eyes. Seems like I say that a lot.



THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2015

## Cold Springs Elementary Super-stars!

You have to see it to believe it. A fairly recent enterprise for 4th graders is The Wax Museum, in which each student depicts "someone who made a difference in Montana" living or dead. In costume and with a set, these 22 students were



Sacagawea, Myrna Loy, Chief Joseph, Evel Knievel...and Kate Davis. The youngster in the blue Raptors of the Rockies T-shirt is Jayden Skousen, complete with a falconry glove, stuffed birds and a live Bearded Lizard! They performed three shows in the Cold Springs gym yesterday for three groups each of students from the school, parents and guests. In an 8 minute memorized speech they tell the tale of their character with wild gesticulations and drama. Hey, it's a TED Talk for kids! I was blown away to say the least, and we hand it to teacher Beth Kennedy for pulling it all together. Jayden was charming and made me blush, as I hid behind my camera to watch her rendition of *The Bird Lady*. She finished with, "Hoot like an owl!"



Sunday, July 5 2015

## Family

My latest project is trying to figure out how to work a Panasonic Lumix camera, and not as easy as I thought. I've been hauling around nearly 7 pounds of gear when out flying the birds, so thought I'd lighten the load to 1.8 lbs. I tested it with this photo of a robin nest just outside the door of the office. One of the chicks was on the ground so I put her back. I took some fireworks shots from our Florence display using the "handheld night shot" mode and looks like I need to read the directions more thoroughly.



# Birds And Art Time...Again

Must be June, time for Birds And Art Camp for Kids at the Missoula Art Museum. Bev Glueckert and I tell the kids that we've been doing this class for 50 years and they don't bat an eye. It feels like that long and each class is a little different. We start with two days of learning about raptor structure and function with live birds to sketch. The young artists fill up an entire wall in the museum with their drawings in our Gallery. Then we have two days of life-sized paper mache creations. Birds are properly painted and adorned with feathers, some with pipe-cleaner legs and googlie eyes. We had a collection of owls, Bald Eagles, Peregrines, kestrels, and our first Martial Eagle and Fork-tailed Flycatcher, artists posing on the old museum steps. I sent these photos of the kids with the Peregrines and American Kestrels to The Peregrine Fund in Boise and they were a big hit!



Kate Davis photos ©

## Fearless Leader of MPI



Congratulations Jay Sumner for being honored by Montana Audubon with their Special Achievement Award 2015- "For your hard work and dedication to Peregrine conservation and management." 50 years of research and going strong.

## Owl Nest

Three or four Great Horned Owl chicks were raised in this old building foundation, discovered by a friend that was changing irrigation pipe. They startled him as they flew out, and me too. The next day I crept up so that they wouldn't fly, it being so hot out. I didn't even see the second bird on the right at the time. This is very close to one of my kestrel nests in the book, and ironically, not far from a coyote den that "fledged" 6 young that same year.



## Missoula Community Access Television Young Filmmakers Camp

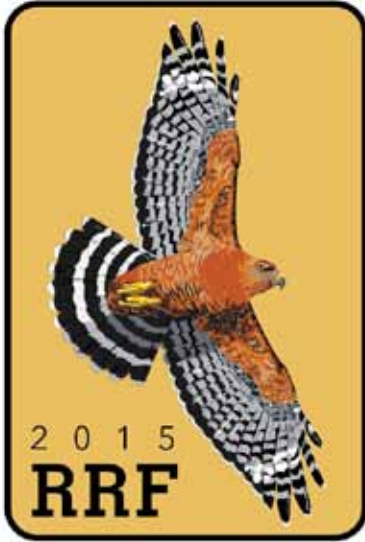


Ron Scholl (center in the hat) and I first started doing these camps in 1999 with the International Wildlife Film Festival, and a student film called "Underwing" won big prizes that year. In it, the narrator in a British BBC-type accent describes the lives of Bobo and Miles the Great Horned Owls that "eat everything... raw!" Chesty the Harris's Hawk flew all over the place, up on the arbor and catching meat in the air. Great kids!



Sixteen magpies in a tree. Lots this summer.

# Raptor Research Foundation Conference 2015



[www.raptorresearchfoundation.org](http://www.raptorresearchfoundation.org)

Nov 4th-8th  
Sacramento

Hosted by the  
Golden Gate Raptor  
Observatory



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## Black-Chinned Hummer



Kate Davis photo ©

Unbelievable beginners luck. A male Black-chinned Hummingbird showed up in 2010 and this must be this same bird. He's in the yard all the time and I started photographing him by standing on a step ladder with a sand bag on the top. I'm shooting 6400th of a second, but the Nikon D800 is kind of slow with just 6 frames per second with the motor drive. So when he showed up in May I hauled out the ladder, slapped the sand on the top, hit the trigger and got this photo in the first second! I have literally hundreds and hundreds of portraits of this guy, and this may be the best. By the way, longevity record for this species from the Bird Banding Lab - 11 years, 2 months, a banded bird recaptured an released in Texas! (I put the stepladder back in the garage that morning, and quit while I'm ahead.)



## MTPR Pea Green Boat

Our last "appearance" on public radio was a fun experiment. Bev Glueckert and I (and host Annie too!) sketched a portrait of Miles the Great Horned Owl. Kids at home were encouraged to look at their field guides and draw along with us. Our powers of description were tested as usual. Cherie Newman took this snapshot and also did a 5 minute spot on the news called "Kate Davis's Passion For Raptors." Check it out at [mtptr.org](http://mtptr.org) See you on MTPR in two months.

## Bald Eagle Beach

Three chicks fledged on July 27th and I was lucky to see/ photograph their first flights. They are part of our backyard landscape most days, hanging around on the hawk buildings and fence. Then back on the beach begging from parents and here, checking out a newly fledged Great Blue Heron, and playing with a tennis ball (right.) Most of the action lately has been attacks from a pair of kestrels whose nest is right between the eagle nest tree and a favorite perching snag. The little falcons are relentless and fearless, and photos featured on our Blog.



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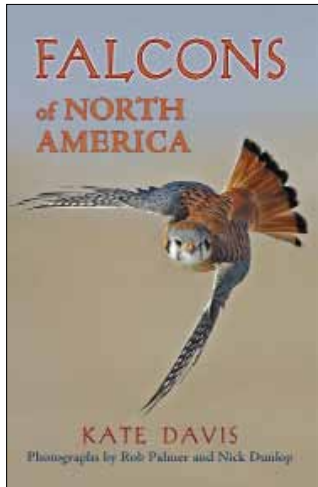
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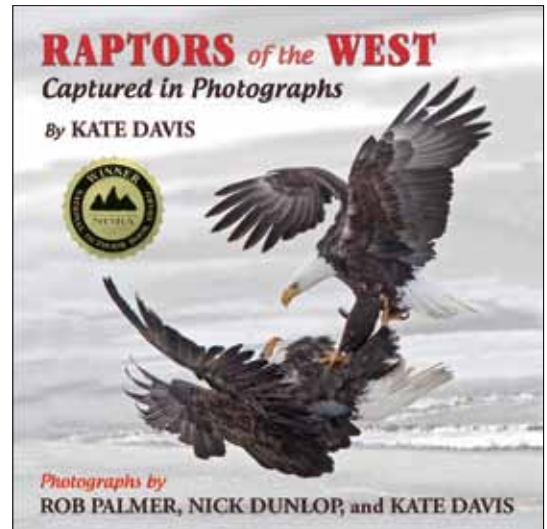
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## Teaching Team:

Golden Eagles	Max ~ \$ 1000
	Nigel ~ \$ 500
Bald Eagle	Sonny ~ \$300
Rough-legged Hawk	Otto ~ \$ 100
Swainson's Hawk	Evita ~ \$ 150
Red-tailed Hawk	Alisa ~ \$ 200
Harris's Hawk	Chesty ~ \$ 150
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Margo ~ \$ 100
American Kestrel	JayDub ~ \$ 75
American Kestrel	Ella ~ \$ 50
American Kestrel	Wes ~ \$ 50
Peregrine Falcon	Sibley ~ \$ 400
Gyr/Peregrine hybrid	Ansel ~ \$ 150
Aplomado Falcon	Sonora ~ \$ 200



Pages: 240 Price: \$22  
Photos/illustrations 230



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

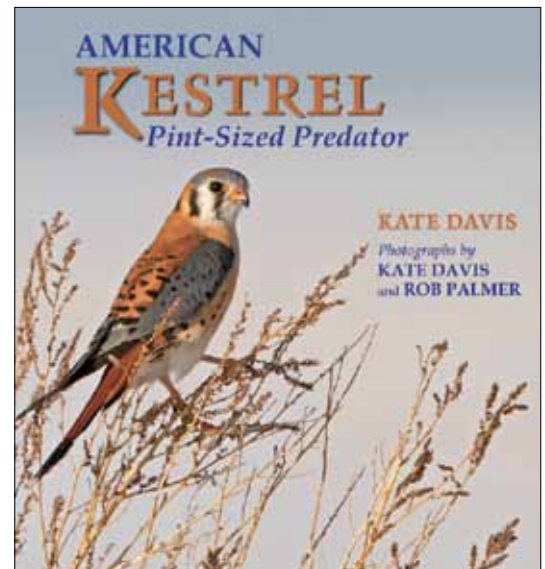
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Photographs: 430



Northern Pygmy-Owl	iPod ~ \$ 50
N. Saw-whet Owl	Owen ~ \$ 50
Great Horned Owls	Jillian ~ \$ 150
	Miles ~ \$ 250



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Photographs: 135



Pages: 104 Price: \$18/23 shipping  
Photographs: 100

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(*matching grant this summer so your money is doubled!*)

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Kate Davis photos ©

Raptors At Risk Exhibition winner, The Peregrine Fund and kestrel



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## Raptors of the Rockies

Educational Programs since 1988

