



# RAPTORS OF THE ROCKIES

P.O. BOX 250, FLORENCE, MONTANA

Education Programs since 1988

# Raptor Round-Up

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NUMBER 54, NOVEMBER 2017

## Magazine Cover Girl (and Boy)



### Lifetime Conservation Achievement Award

In October I was the totally-surprised winner of the Lifetime Conservation Achievement Award 2017 from the illustrious Conservation Roundtable, presenter Dr. Erick Greene. He asked me months ago to send my resume and I informed him that I didn't have one as I haven't had a real job in 30 years!

*Continued on page 2*

This has been a year beyond all years and several happy endings. Tom's health has improved, the best news of all. We have a few new Teaching team members with amazing stories, and I was delighted and honored with two cover shots of birds at the beach. The University of Montana alumni *Montanan* was searching for a photo to illustrate their story on Project Osprey and immediately chose my shot on the river from July 21st, 100,000 copies printed. Then I got the great news that *Montana Outdoors* was working on an issue discussing Bald Eagle recovery in the state and wanted my images, story by Julie Lue, also of Florence. "Our" nest on the Bitterroot River, 55,000 copies printed and sent across the country. Editor Luke Duran reports that 60% are mailed out of state, so our local birds make it big. My favorite "snapshot" of the year however is a non-raptor, this Great Blue Heron posing in the scenic snag, blown up big and framed for the wall in our house, and over my Mom's dining room table! This sure makes all the hours at the beach worthwhile, as if the pure enjoyment of watching animal splendor wasn't enough. Can hardly wait until next spring when it all starts up again.



### Front Row Seat for the Lolo Peak Fire of 2017

A little wilderness fire that started after a lightning strike in July became the primary concern for Bitterroot residents by August, thousands evacuated from their homes as the blaze raged south through the mountains across the valley from our home. Mercifully, most were spared, but I was obsessed with capturing the fire's fury and advance (see page 5.) The smoke was so thick by August that we couldn't see the Bitterroots, and barely across the river. Our birds hunkered down and were fine, thank you all that were concerned.

## MISSION STATEMENT

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

- \* To educate schools and the public through the use of live birds - the falcons, hawks, eagles 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;
- \* To get people to go outside.

Here's a hawk with a story, even in the newspapers on June 28th entitled "Ravalli woman gets attached to hawk - literally." This bird was retrieved off the roadside by 87-year-old Colleen Powell who said, "He was standing there like he was thumbing a ride." When she reached to retrieve him (later confirmed to be a her) the hawk nailed her in the hand, and the two weren't separated until a doctor in the hospital emergency room broke out the needle nose pliers. Rehabber Judy Hoy took over after that and offered the bird to us, knowing that our beloved program professional hawk Alisa had just died. So this hawk joined us on July 6th, a scruffy new addition that has molted into a beauty.

She was missing most of her left wing tip, bone and all, and had healed over so had been foraging on the ground for some time, apparently. She has a fairly calm demeanor and at first I thought she may have been an illegal pet, but doubting that now that training has begun, a stubborn girl. The strangest part is the plumage, very pale brown feathers called "dilute plumage" and after she arrived, a massive molt began in earnest. The new feathers are normal with adult tail feathers. At a year and a half old, Simone is a welcome new addition as you "must have a Red-tail," our most common big hawk and a bird everyone can identify, especially by that raspy *kree* call always attributed to Bald Eagles in films and advertisements (and radio stations.)



## Awards for Conservation



Recipients of the 2017 Missoula Conservation Roundtable awards. From left, Kate Davis, Jack Ader, Diana Six, Travis Ross.

(Continued) I sent Erick Greene my biography instead of resume which was good enough, and I am included in the Lifetime Conservation Award with the ranks of previous winners - Monte Dolack and Mary Beth Percival, Senator Max Baucus, and Smoke and Thelma Elser who hosted the gala gathering at their tack rooms and stables. A standing ovation from attendees and the greatest folks in the west in conservation and getting the word out there. Thanks everyone, you are my heroes! In my little speech I recalled our 1000th education program at Lee Metcalf Refuge in 2006, and someone shouted out "One thousand more," to which I cracked up. I told this audience that some people remark, "and it's only October." As if one could do two thousand programs in a year. Well, we are close and it should be in four or five years, if all goes as planned.

From the Missoulian newspaper story, Nov 1st:  
*Kate Davis of Florence is the 2017 recipient of the Lifetime Conservation Award, given on a periodic basis since 2001. Davis was recognized for "almost three decades of passionate and energetic work focused on conservation and education about raptors," the press release said. "She has been a 'force of nature' for raptor conservation and education, presenting more than 1,640 educational programs on raptors in 130 schools." Davis has also been an important contributor to basic science and international programs focused on raptor conservation, and has published a number of books featuring her exceptional photographs.*

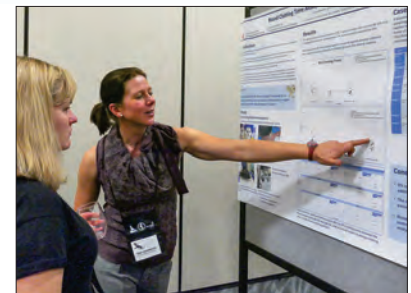


## Raptor Research Foundation Conference 2017

The highlight of the year since my first conference in 2004 has been the Raptor Research Foundation annual gathering, This year in Salt Lake City. The hosts were heroes HawkWatch International and I photographed the events, 800 photos pared down to 600 currently, whew. I presented at that first meeting in Bakersfield, which was in conjunction with the California Hawking Club. I'll never forget the last question at the desk when I arrived, "Will you be checking in with a hawk?" I was hooked.

HawkWatch International hosted, a fantastic meeting with over 300 attendees, and I swear one third were students. Great hope for the future of research and this fine organization, plus a fine trend for all of us concerned with the well-being of the environment- especially our favorite icon, the birds of prey! Congratulations all around to hosts, presenters, vendors, and raptor friends from around the world.

I entered this shot of Sib standing on my buddy Dale Simmon's head in the humor category of the photography competition, curated by Nick Dunlop. Dale is our webmaster for the photography web site, newly updated and looks super! [www.raptorsoftherockies.com](http://www.raptorsoftherockies.com)



Pal Sofi Hindmarch explains her poster on rodenticide contaminant risk to raptors.





Kate Davis photos ©

I had a "thing" about Red Squirrels this year, the good native species. I love these little guys and had to quickly get some shots before the dogs spotted them. Even then they would often just sit tight and scold us all. Autumn colors sure didn't last, going from orange and a little red on October 23rd, then wind and gone two days later. Bye-bye.



Sibley the Peregrine Falcon has started her 15th season of hunting 'em up - ducks and pheasants and hasn't lost her prowess. Plus she's up to 545 programs and 759 tours since a baby and her first "gig" at Franklin Elementary School.

Join us for a free program **Thursday, December 14th** for the **Cross Country Ski Club**: Open to everyone, with our Bitterroot Ski friends, 6 p.m. potluck, 7 p.m. program with PowerPoint and raptors. At the Presbyterian Church, 1220 West Main St. in Hamilton, and lots of fun for all. See Sibley, Simon, Simone and Owen.



# Simon's Humble Beginnings

*RIGHT:* Simon the new Great Horned Owl had his first school program in October, starting out with a long stare at the perched Peregrine across the room. This was even more memorable as we had a special guest sitting here in the front row. Our young owl is named for a dear friend that was killed in a terrible motorcycle accident right when the baby bird arrived at his new home. Simon's brother Alex Caddy was visiting from Britain and perfect timing for him to see avian Simon the Owl dazzle the kids. And our best buds Vern Argo and Kristen Wood were in the Grizzly football wear there in front as well. It was quite the experience, emotional for many of us and glad to have Alex back in the Big Sky, joined by his dad Adrian a few days later. We are delighted to report that this rapidly growing raptor is indeed a male (females are larger), proved by the deep hoot we heard when he met Alex!



*BELOW:* Simon was the perfect program pal in September at Fact & Fiction Books for the Montana Book Festival in downtown Missoula. This was our umpteenth program at our favorite book store, but this time a seated audience and all eyes on the owl. Good boy.



Kathy Price photo ©

*LOWER RIGHT:* Simon met Adrian Caddy and the sculpture brought over from the UK, a tender meeting captured in dozens of photos by Pam Voth. Adrian had this likeness of the owl made by an artist friend and actually brought it over in his carry-on by airplane, bubble wrapped in a duffle bag! It's a perfect rendering in chain saw art, and is currently perched in our living room, our favorite art piece. Adrian and Alex also enjoyed a few days of shooting rifles and pistols, a craving they always bring from Britain. We thank Michael and Ginny DeNeve for the hospitality at your fine shooting range and look forward to seeing the Caddys again here next year.



FRIDAY AUGUST 4, 2017  
**PIKE!**

I have had the great pleasure of "entertaining" my brother and his three kids this week, and back to the beach tonight. In the meantime, on Monday this Osprey plunged sub-surface and swam back to shore, just his head showing for much of the trip and hoped he was all right. Another Osprey dive-bombed once and minutes later the answer was revealed - he had nailed a huge Northern Pike as big as he was, that had to be dragged to shore! You Go, Fish Hawk and catch more of those non-native duck-eating evil fish.



Kate Davis photos ©

SUNDAY AUGUST 6, 2017  
**Eggs in One Basket**

Sibley the Peregrine laid 16 eggs this year, the beautiful brown flecked ones. They are infertile and at 14 years old I wish she would cut it out. The photoperiod or length of days in the spring causes our birds to think of breeding and the Gyr/Peregrine hybrid Ansel makes amorous chugging sounds for months. This makes Sib think it's time to breed, and she sort of halfheartedly incubates a great mound of eggs. The little ones are just a few that the kestrels produced this year, the the big white one, our Swainson's Hawk's egg. And NO, I don't eat them.



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2017

**We're Back!**

My ancient iMac computer died and after a week and a half of trips to Missoula, several options that didn't work, we are back with brand new computer and finally new photos and news. At least there is still some action



on the beach and here is a Pileated passing by. Whew. More on the way.  
ps: LOTS more computer woes and lost CONTACTS, so email me.

TUESDAY OCTOBER 17, 2017

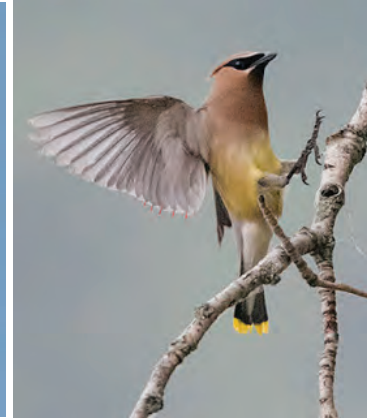
**R.I.P. Audrey**

Our 15-year old constant companion cat Audrey passed away last night and will be very much missed. This was sudden and unexpected, but she had been yowling lately, constantly inside then outside day and night. Audrey seemed omnipresent in the house, garage, yard - everywhere. She even accompanied us to the river in the evenings. Well, she followed Tom as she was his cat. Abrupt loss and poor Audrey. This will take some getting used to.



SATURDAY, AUGUST 12, 2017

**Tower? Are We Set For a Landing?**



WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2017

**Simone the Red-tailed Hawk**

Our newest family member had her debut program on Montana Public Radio, Pea Green Boat with host Annie Garde. Always a bit of a scare, not knowing how she will react to a travel box ride in the car and suddenly "on the air live," but she was awesome.

This photo is taken from the control booth by Rhett Pruitt-Hoff, her two kids Henry and Sietze also as guests. No, that's not John Floridis playing guitar on the right - just a poster on the wall! She still has a few feathers poking up on her head, but otherwise has molted into a gorgeous hawk, ready and rarin' to go.





An honor to grace each of the months for a new calendar, brainchild of Joseph Dane at HawkWatch. The fun part was finding month-appropriate raptors with portrait, color, and action. It has been fun to see which images are favorites, but the winner so far is August - the kestrel perched on the flying Bald Eagle's face. We have some left from the Raptor Research Foundation Conference, but going fast!



Official Florence Fire Photographer

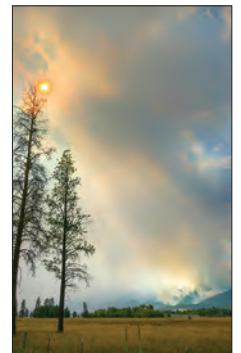
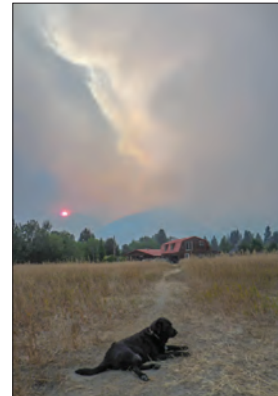
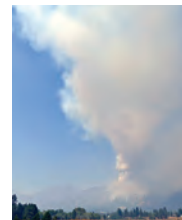
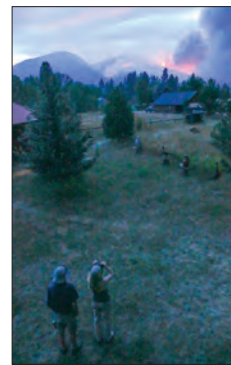
The first photo is the Lolo Peak Fire across the valley on July 23rd, smoke billowing from a lightning caused blaze first detected on July 15th. We could see three other forest fires from our house then, we thought it's not even August yet...The next shot is Tom and Kelly Brewster watching the fire racing south on the infamous night of August 18th, taken from a window over the garage and not from a drone (as some people thought!) The most dramatic action I captured was the next day, the Saturday of the Blow-Up. At this point many Chinook helicopters with water drops and air tankers full of retardant gave up for a while, what a scene. Tragically one firefighter was killed by a falling snag and two homes were destroyed as the fire raced south along the Bitterroot Mountains.

Several thousand people were under mandatory evacuation, including our friends Pat Johnson and Kelly Brewster. They stayed here for a few weeks, dogs and cats and whatever they could grab on their way out - I can't imagine the stress. We felt safe here as fire camp was on our little dead-end lane. 1213 firefighters living on our street at the peak in late August (bottom right corner shot) heavy traffic but most polite at 20 mph. I stopped in at the Fire Information Tent up at the bank every day and picked up the update sheets, soon becoming friends with the info officers from Florida, Arizona, New Jersey, Alaska, all over the place. I promised that this was a really a pretty place minus the thick smoke. They could only imagine. I took some favorite shots and assembled them into this little flier which made the rounds in fire camp and beyond.

It seemed like this would go on forever, flames from torching trees visible from the house even in the middle of the night as it moved south past us. Finally, the weather event that changed it in October, and all told the Lolo Peak Fire burned 54,000 acres, cost \$48.4 million, but no more loss of life or homes, unlike the other tragedies we saw this summer. Unbelievable year and crazy to see the white snow on the big patches of black across the valley. The new normal.



Peanut and Mookie at the beach after the smoke cleared.



## Bald Eagle Nest in the Back

It's year six for the eagle nest across the river, and a six minute walk from the house to set up the camera. The first time I gained a healthy respect for Bald Eagles was when I photographed a family at our friends Dick and Christine Everett's on the Clark Fork River in 2011. I spent four months at that nest, more or less, and a 45 minute trip one way. That was the book about FOUR young eagles fledging and all of the prey items, first flights, and interactions with their surroundings that spring and summer. Now I have the luxury of standing by the beach for hours every evening getting shots like these. They are several camera bodies, lenses, and one tripod upgrade later, plus Lightroom and Photoshop to keep them all straight, way too many.

I sure got to know all of these birds: three years with three chicks, two with two, and one with one, not a bad batting average. Bald Eagle have certainly recovered (read the *Montana Outdoors* story) from 12 nesting pairs the year I moved to Montana of 1978, up to 800 now-a-days. My opinion is that they have adapted to people in that time, not so shy and even nesting close to homes. A wide diet, with "our" birds here feeding mostly on Columbian Ground Squirrels and carrion when the waters are high, generalized feeders. These birds are doing just fine, that's for certain. And both adults are now perched over the nest across the river, watching them through the spotting scope in the living room. Our Resident Raptors.



Kate Davis photos ©



The year started out slow for Osprey sightings at the beach, and I noticed that the nesting Bald Eagles were especially aggressive to intruders this summer. Then hallelujah the fish hawks returned finished up the season with several posers, the last one flying by on October 28th. All told, 688 Osprey images, but few hundred at the platform at Kathy Price's place. We will welcome these awesome raptors back from a long migration around April 1st, always a thrill.

My pal Anne Iverson from Mountain Press Publishing Co. and husband Eric Edlund hosted a gala reunion over Thanksgiving, a tradition for many years. They booked the stone chalet in Stevensville, just a hop, skip and a jump from Florence so I suggested a tour of the Raptor Ranch. Twenty folks from mostly Seattle and California but also Iowa and Illinois spent a few hours exploring, which culminated in this customary singing of "Happy Tails" as a finale. They had substituted their own special lyrics that one new friend told me they added in 1973 in San Francisco. Wow, I thought my ears were playing tricks on me. Apparently they call themselves The Nitwits, a fun group and inappropriate moniker as they identified the last names of all of our Jazz Birds, especially Wes (Montgomery) the kestrel. Okay, Becky got them all correct, and thanks for your generosity, not Nitwits at all!



LOWER LEFT: The Eagle Building with MPG Ranch shining in the background AND that beautiful heron from page 1



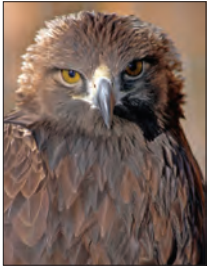
## Salish Language School Field Trip

The very shy (!) youngsters were back, and we were worried about the snow of late November. Teacher Shanna assured me, "They love snow!" And apparently pigeons, dogs, and birds of prey. A 5-year-old informed me privately several times, "They ARE predators." Brilliant.

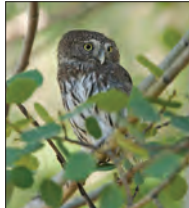


The scope was on the eagle nest, but not for long.

# Season's Greetings from the Raptor Ranch!



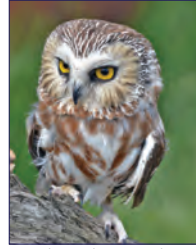
Max the Golden Eagle



iPod the Northern Pygmy-Owl



Evita the Swainson's Hawk



Owen the Northern Saw-whet Owl

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Sonora the Aplomado Falcon



Sonny the Bald Eagle



Jillian the Great Horned Owl

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Ansel the Gyrfalcon/Peregrine



Sibley the Peregrine Falcon



Nigel the Golden Eagle



Simone the Red-tailed Hawk



Ella and Wes the American Kestrels



Simon the Great Horned Owl



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What a year...

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Educational Programs since 1988

