

Raptors of the Rockies  
P.O. Box 250, FLORENCE, MT 59833

Educational Programs since 1988

# Raptor Round-Up

[www.raptorsoftherockies.org](http://www.raptorsoftherockies.org)  
See a color version of the newsletter

NUMBER 34, APRIL 2010

## Third Occasional Raptor Backer Celebration

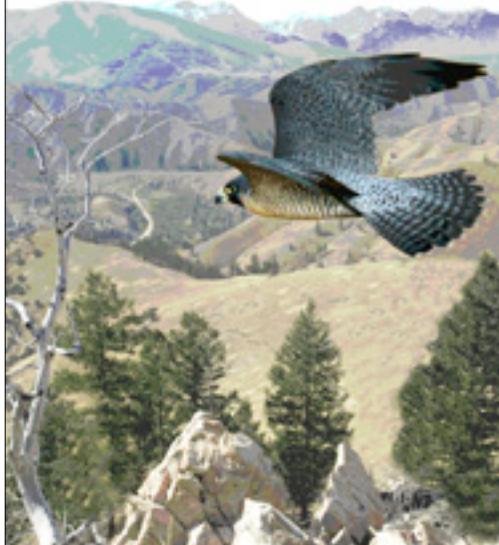
Our Backers are the Best! We had the pleasure of hosting a get together to thank our supporters and celebrate 22 years of education on the first day of spring. Bayern Brewing in Missoula kindly donated their upstairs (and some beer!) and it was so much fun we decided to make it an annual event. I had a PowerPoint of birds, programs, and projects running non-stop on the big screen, and YouTube films of Sibley and Chesty and a Birds And Art workshop. Also sharing the spotlight was Alisa the new Red-tailed Hawk, who is proving to be a perfect ambassador. We also thank Famous Dave's Barbecue for the wings (what else could we serve?) Photographer Keith Fialcowitz captured the action, and what a great place to have a party!



Board Member Kathy Heffernan

## State Audubon Conference Coming to Missoula

**Wings Across the Big Sky**  
Montana Audubon Bird Festival



June  
4, 5, 6  
Holiday Inn  
Downtown  
at the Park

Events,  
field trips,  
speakers all  
three days  
  
Raptors of  
the Rockies  
program  
Friday 6 pm

Kate Davis photos and artwork, left ©



Meet Alisa  
our new  
Red-tailed Hawk  
page 2

## Winner Best In Show



My photo from last spring of the nesting Snowy Egret just won the Best in Show for the IAATE photo competition 2010 - International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators, at the conference in Albuquerque. Gale Johnson of Custom Digital Imaging (CDI) has printed this and many other photographs that will be on display (and for sale) at The Missoula Artists' Shop, downtown Missoula, 304 N. Higgins Ave for the month of April. It's BIRDFEST 2010.

Check out our new web site, dedicated to photography of raptors, other birds, and my favorite, miscellaneous. Dale Simmons of EzPics designs sites for wildlife artists around the world, and somehow we fit the bill. I am honored to be among his clients and friends that include Guy Coheleach whose kestrel print hangs on the wall to this day, a gift from my dad when I was 14. Thanks Dale, and I look forward to lots more hunts with the falcon and dogs.

[www.raptorsoftherockies.com](http://www.raptorsoftherockies.com)

## 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 ©

Sibley's last hunt of the year in the Sapphires with Dale Simmons, and a view of One Horse Creek across the valley. I'll be up there looking for a Peregrine nest soon enough, and last year it fledged Prairie Falcons. We'll look to the north and south too, Carlton and Bass Creeks, with fingers crossed.

## New Teaching Team Hawk

**O**n December 7th, we were approved to keep a hatch-year Red-tailed Hawk that has been residing at the Bitterroot Wildlife Rehabilitation Center since early July. The youngster was standing on the ground in Arlee under the nest, and after several days, was retrieved by a neighbor. We determined that she was totally blind, and rehabber Judy Hoy hand-fed her mice with cell salts, electrolytes and MSM, confident that her vision would improve. With monthly visits to our veterinarian Dr. Doug Bower at Florence Veterinary, we were encouraged to find that her right eye was showing pupil reaction and it appeared that she could see.

We were happy to find that she could feed herself and was very calm (and beautiful) and has been a great program bird. Ansel the falcon has a new roommate in his 16 foot building, and not the Odd Couple as they both have vision problems. Alisa sports a brick-red tail now, but a she's just a year old. In July, she dropped all twelve tail feathers at once due to malformed feather tips, and they all came back with adult coloration.

Her name comes from my friend, Alisa Clancy, jazz aficionado, KCSM Jazz radio in California, and friend A'Lisa, different spelling. Her first program was also a radio-event on Montana Public Radio's childrens' program, Pea Green Boat, of course. All our birds debut with Annie and she was great for a while, then jumped to the floor to explore the radio studio, live and on the air. What a debut performance.

Alisa has such a calm demeanor that we found she could stand for hours, posing for Birds And Art classes. Plus we can leave her on a perch with other birds out of their travel boxes, and she just turns her head and listens to me go on and on. What a perfect ambassador bird! I had a friend in Wyoming that kept his Red-tail for thirty-eight years. Alisa turns one in June. Let's do some math here...yikes.



Monte Dolack photo ©



Kate Davis photos ©



above right: Monte Dolack took this photo of the young rehab bird before she made it over to Judy's, still blind with a brown, barred, baby tail.

below left: Her first school program, Rattlesnake Elementary School assembly for nearly 400 attendees. Author Sneed Collard and Renee from The Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota admires the new star, Alisa.

## Exec. Direc. Breaks a Wing

Not the first broken bone for me, but wow, what a pain. I cracked my humerus in a high speed crash skiing in January, and a closer look at the x-rays showed a little bone chunk in the shoulder that had moved ever so slightly. Our great friends at Missoula Bone and Joint suggested that I "take it easy" for a while, which I found is not easy. I've been taking Judy Hoy's homeopathic remedy that improved Alisa's sight, and hope that is helping with my "wing." A group effort with Judy, Andy Puckett and Louis Westenfelder. I promise - no pounding, hammering and welding for a while.

# Birds And Art Workshops

You asked for it, touted the description for the Birds And Art For Adults workshop at the Missoula Art Museum. For years, we have held classes for kids, and finally the parents had a crack at rendering our birds in art. We had sketching sessions with Nigel, Alisa, and Sibley, all on their best behaviors, then sketching and wire sculptures on day two with Sib, Buster and Miles, the Great-horned Owl. We'll have another workshop "for Grown-Ups" at the MAM in July, and kids in June. As they say, space is limited so sign up soon!

Raptor Backer and Bead Lady Elizabeth McCubbin sponsored a Birds And Art at the Missoula International School for 43 creative students. Alisa, Buster, and Miles posed for sketching sessions, and the resulting sculptures will be displayed at the International Wildlife Film Festival. I had a little lesson in current pop culture from the older students and walked away feeling really un-hip. Oh well, it's too hard to keep up with that stuff.

Photos of our students and videos of the paper mache class will be featured in our program at the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago, and who can't help but smile.



Linden How photos ©



Kate Davis photos ©



## Program at the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago

Our friend Gary Wolfe, Director of Vital Ground, got us a "gig" in Chicago, coming up in May. He is speaking in April, discussing the work of restoring grizzly bear habitat in the West, and he suggested that I get on the speakers' roster as well. So I'll be part of the Spring Lecture Series at the Brookfield Zoo, an hour-long discussion of conservation through education, and no live birds but a PowerPoint. This is especially appropriate as Brookfield was the first zoo I ever visited as a kid in Chicago, and zoos have shaped my life. I began rehabilitation, education, taxidermy, wildlife art, and falconry as a teenager at the Cincinnati Zoo's Junior Zoologists Club in the early '70's. I have been digging out some old photos, putting together a program and thankfully, they are flying me there! I might have to wear a dress.

## Upcoming Public Raptor Programs:

May 1, Saturday: spectrUM Discovery Center, 1 pm sharp, Join us on the University of Montana campus for our return to spectrUM! We will have a Raptors of the Rockies program in the new Skaggs Business Building, south end of campus lecture hall. Children and adults, \$3.50 for non-members.

June 4, Friday: Montana Audubon's State Bird Festival, An evening Raptors of the Rockies program at the state Audubon Conference, downtown at the Holiday Inn at the Park, 6 pm. For other events, speakers, and field trips, check out their web site : [mtaudubon.org](http://mtaudubon.org)

June 14-18, Monday through Thursday: Birds and Art, The Missoula Art Museum, with Bev Beck Glueckert, we will study live birds then make paper mache birds to take home. Ages 8-10 10 am to 12 noon each day. Contact MAM to sign up! 728-0447 and [www.missoulaartmuseum.org](http://www.missoulaartmuseum.org)

June 21-25, Monday through Friday: Birds In Film, Missoula Community Access Television (MCAT) week-long workshop for kids. Filming at the Ranch all day Wednesday. Details page 5.

July 17, Saturday: Birds And Art for Grown-Ups, The Missoula Art Museum, from 11:00-1:00 pm, sketching sessions with three of our perfect models. 728-0447 for details.

# Eagles Are the Messengers: Native Americans and Raptors

Scott Azure is Assiniboine and Sioux, raised in Poplar, Montana and he offered to share a bit of his culture with me in an interview. We met at our program for "Montana Wildlife" at the University of Montana in November, and he and his family have since spent some time with our raptors. With Max and Nigel in the background, Scott discussed his special relationship with eagles.

Scott pulls up in his pickup with a broad smile on his face. He tells me that an eagle leapt out of a tree and flew over him as he was driving here, a good sign. The bird wanted to make sure Scott saw him, and now will be with him the whole day. Golden Eagles are the grandfathers that have gone before us, and they fly the highest, watching over. When our relatives pass and go to the other side, they come to us as eagles, helpers that carry our prayers up to the heavens. Other helpers are the Buffalo and Thunderbird, sun and moon. Our ancestors are always watching.

At our university program, I had Nigel on a glove and I was discussing Golden Eagle's habit of building bulky stick nests on cliffs, sometimes in trees. Scott raised his hand and offered a little gem. Where he was from in Northeastern Montana, they often have neither. Eagles nest on the ground, up on hilltop with a view in all directions, and surround themselves with a wall of cactus and thorny sticks.

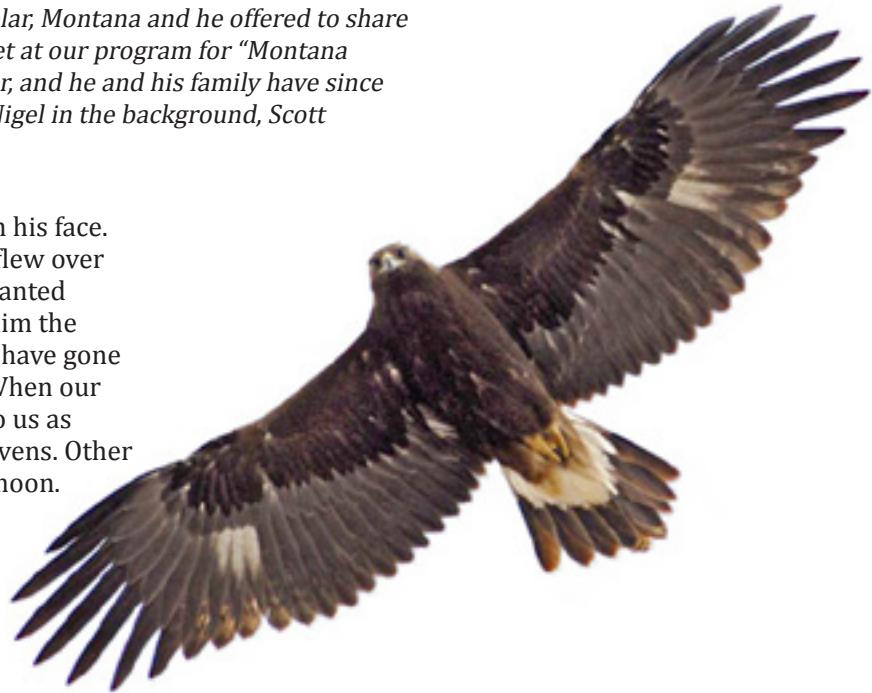
Golden Eagle feathers are revered in Assiniboine culture, and are earned or received as deeds of honor, coming of age. In times past, young men made a nest on a hilltop like the one he described and covered themselves in sticks, holding a rabbit as bait. They waited long hours, even days, to trick an eagle into landing, and then grabbed the bird, pulled out a tail feather and released him back to the sky. Eagle feathers are earned, and not taken lightly.

Scott picks up a feather in the enclosure and explains that each one is unique, and display a picture. Some people are better at seeing the scene, like a buffalo or face. The quill represents the lifeline, and the barbs off to the sides are the decisions and distractions in life, different roads one may take. Difficulties we encounter veer us off the path, and we must come back to the quill, to finish the walk to the end. "Wisdom is knowing what to do with knowledge," says Scott, and he gestures to the tip of feather that is narrow and worn.

Eagle feathers are protected by three federal laws, and only Native Americans can possess them. Scott has a federal permit to keep and give away eagle feathers, but many Indians feel that this is a spiritual right and don't want to deal with the government. He has had people offer to sell him dead birds, or buy feathers for money, and acknowledges a black market in carcasses. Young Golden Eagles are the most valuable, being as tail and wing feathers are bicolored, black and white.

Back growing up in Poplar, farmers and ranchers brought dead eagles they found to one spiritual man that knew what to do. Every part of a bird is used, all of the feathers, the feet, many bones, and the eagle head. What is left is wrapped in red cloth and hanged in a tree. The spirit lives in this torso and is offered back with gratitude.

The other option for obtaining eagle feathers is through the National Eagle Repository in Colorado, that stipulates "only enrolled members of federally recognized



tribes may apply." Requests range from a single feather for a school graduation, to a whole carcass of an immature Golden Eagle, estimated wait of four years minimum. Demand is extremely high.

Scott sees a disrespect by many tribal people that strive to collect as many feathers as they can. Instead of honoring a young man with one feather for that honorable deed, he sees tiny children decked out head to toe in eagle feathers. Pow wows are celebrations of honor and a place to make announcements, and perhaps prize money for dances has changed the atmosphere. Some people may have forgotten the significance of these treasures, the feathers.

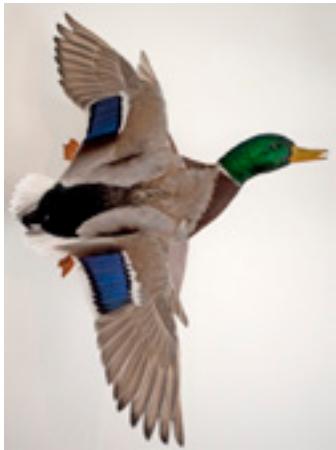
Culture can't exist without the land - the animals, trees, plants, roots, medicines are all land based and are the spirits. When Indians were described by the new white settlers as "pagans" for worshipping the ground, it is actually true and not a slur. Eagles linked the land-based people with their ancestors high above.

Bald Eagles are also messengers, and are still respected in Indian Country but not so much as Goldens, whose feather are the most sought after. Scott (and countless others) find it a bit ironic that such a scavenger and thief would be chosen as the national symbol. They feel Golden Eagles are superior hunters, catching a variety of clever animals, so more worthy of their place in culture.

Finally, I have to ask him his thoughts on owls. A common misconception is that native people think that owls bring death, a superstition instilled by white people "for control." Owls are messengers too, and take over for the eagles at night. They don't necessarily bring bad news, but they offer some sort of message or change. "People see or hear one and tend to wait and wait for something to happen so they can blame it on the owl."

*Scott's name in Assiniboine is Tokaheya Iyaye (Goes Ahead of the Rest)*

# Custom Birdworks and the Big Game Connection

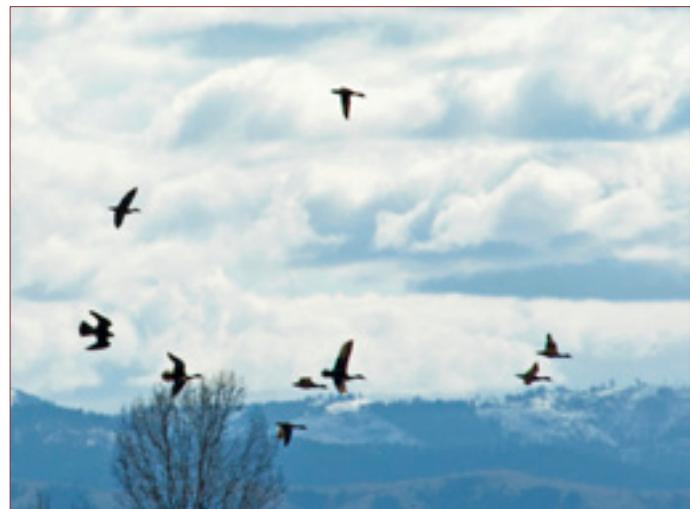


I have always coveted a taxidermy mount from Dale Manning ever since I worked at Bitterroot Taxidermy in the 1980's and '90's. Dale has won just about every national and international award that can be doled out, covers of magazines and lately a dozen ribbons and plaques for his leaping Bighorn Sheep.

Dale and family came on a falcon hunt in 2008, and since has been on our Board of Directors. This season, Sibley caught a huge Mallard drake, one so big she could not haul it out of the slough. I slipped the prize in my vest, and now it proudly hangs on the wall in the office, flying to remind me of the hunt.

When Sib came inside to perch as she does every day, she hardly noticed that the duck on the wall was formally in her clutches. She glanced up, let out a weak "cack" and resumed preening. So the drake has a permanent spot in the house, a perfect companion to the artwork and photos (and falcon.)

Dale's shop is 1616 Montana Street, Missoula, next to Bayern Brewing!



Notice the Peregrine on the far left, and an unlucky duck on the right.



*Raptors of the Rockies  
and  
Missoula Community Access TV  
Present*



## Wild Shots

**Learn the beginning,  
middle and end  
of movie-making.**



**This afternoon camp meets from 1:15 to 5:45 p.m. Monday, June 21 through Friday, June 25, 2010**



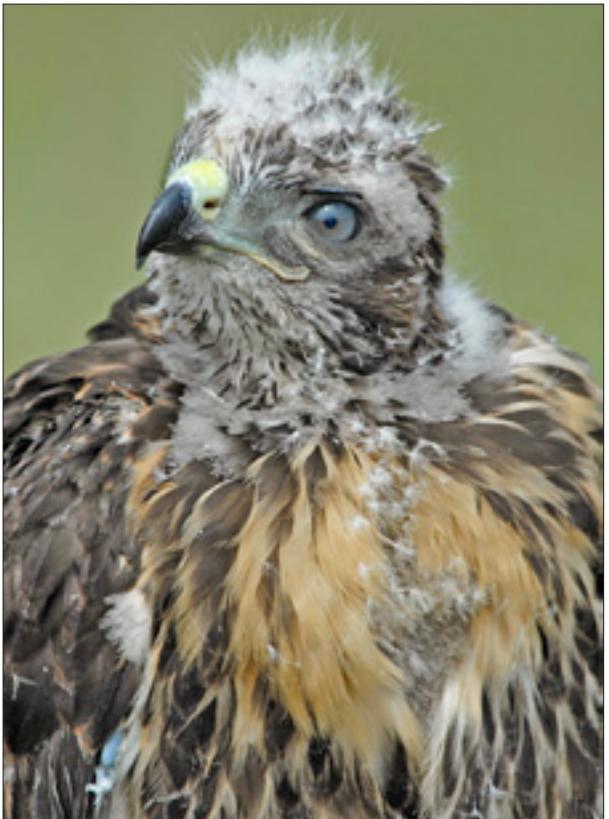
Campers will learn how to use digital cameras, both still and video. Computer editing and the use of a television studio is also available. Hands on training, building teamwork, lead up to a public screening and live television show on the last day of camp cablecast to more than 17,000 Missoula households on MCAT's Channel 7. Work produced in the camp may also be shown on Missoula's three local broadcast stations.

On Wednesday the Camp will make a field trip to Raptors of the Rockies for a day of filming live birds such as eagles, hawks, falcons and owls. The group will meet at 10:30 a.m. (pack a lunch!) and visit the Raptor Ranch.

Participation in the camp provides a year-long membership in Missoula Community Access Television, a \$40 value. Patient & fun-loving MCAT trainers give you a great experience using computers and digital media.

The camp is suitable for kids age 9 to 13 (maybe a little older) and costs \$100.

Kate Davis photo ©



IAATE award for this photo of a young Red-tailed Hawk



## Sharp-tailed Grouse

In a "business" trip to the Columbus, Montana area, I just met up with photographer Rob Palmer to shoot some grouse leks. The males pick a stomping ground to dance and spar with other suitors, and have a fidelity to a certain spot called a lek. I was surprised to see twenty birds in one little spot only 30 yards across, surrounded by the hundreds of miles of open grassland. After early morning grouse photography, we worked on the new *Raptors of the West* book, selecting 250 photos from Rob's collection. Then out looking for Peregrines near Absarokee, and we were not disappointed as we spotted a pair of falcons near Beehive. We thank Kevin Thompson for his vast knowledge of the area and its avian inhabitants, and Ken and Lora Mesch for their hospitality.



# Birds of Prey meet Kingfishers on the Lower Rio Grande

by Deborah Richie Oberbillig, Raptors Board Member

A peregrine falcon zooms out of nowhere to pursue a flock of blackbirds above the Lower Rio Grande. I drop my canoe paddle across the bow with a clatter and raise my binoculars to trace the rapid pursuit. Wham! The peregrine strikes a blackbird right in the middle of the pack and flaps over to the Mexico side with its prey grasped in those deadly talons.



I'd come to this part of Texas in early March to search for the trifecta of kingfisher species for an article I'm writing for Birder's World, and as part of research for my own larger book project on Belted Kingfishers. To see Ringed, Green and Belted Kingfishers together would be nirvana for me.

In most of North America, you'll only see the Belted Kingfisher patrolling the waterways with its clamorous rattle. But things are different at the border with Mexico where tropics meet a temperate climate. Birders from around the world pour into the McAllen, Texas, area to head to the last wild fragments—only five percent of the original native habitat, but still representing 11 ecosystems,

One of the best ways to see kingfishers is to canoe the Rio Grande—signing up for trips offered by Friends of the Wildlife Corridor. The wildest five-mile stretch—where I watched the peregrine—falls below Falcon Dam, from Chapeño to Salineño.

Watching the peregrine falcon drama would have made my day, but I was even luckier. First, a Belted Kingfisher flew ahead of us. Within seconds, a tiny Green

Kingfisher winged low across the water from the U.S. to the Mexico side, to be joined by her mate—a stunning male with a fiery red chest. On the backside of an island, a Ringed Kingfisher—hunched up high on a branch, stared down into the water. Envision a Belted Kingfisher on steroids. Throw in a wildly red breast and you've got the Ringed. I gave out an involuntary yelp of joy when he tilted forward and dove straight down 25 feet into the water after a fish.

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## Ansel Goes AWOL

**A**nsel, our 6 year old Gyrfalcon x Peregrine hybrid is back safe and sound after three nights out on his own, touring the Bitterroot Valley. Our latest adventure in looking for lost birds began on a Thursday afternoon, when I returned from a Rattlesnake School program. I was carrying Alisa back to the enclosure that she shares with Ansel and found the door wide open. I must have closed it but not stuck the lock through the hasp, and Ansel was gone, what a sick feeling. The term "needle in a haystack" came to mind several times over the next few days, as I searched haphazardly. Emotions changed to elation when an ex-falconer called to say he had him in his living room. Gary Cargille lives twenty-seven miles away and Ans was standing in a field by his house. He just happened to have a pheasant thawing for dinner, and up hopped the falcon to his glove. On went the jesses and Ansel spent the night on a block perch in his living room, feasting of the pheasant that was to be Gary's dinner. What a huge area to search, and small world that she ended up in a falconer's yard.

The next week I was visiting with the staff at nearby Lee Metcalf Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, and Kim Pennington asked with a laugh, "Lost any birds lately?" Our Harris's Hawk Deja had been hanging out at the refuge a few years ago, and Sibley has strayed that far a few times. So my answer to the question was that yes - the black Gyrfalcon flew right past there last Thursday.

"What? A guy from out-of town came in that day, admittedly an amateur birdwatcher and reported a Gyrfalcon standing in a tree near the parking lot of the Visitor's Center. We told him we'd make note of it and cracked up, as that would be a near impossibility, especially this time of year." Well, that was our pal Ansel, on his way to Gary's house. I wish I could tell the mystery man that saw him, *good spotting*.

Keep up with the happenings with our birds and program on our Blog Page, directly on our web site or <http://raptorsoftherockies.blogspot.com>



Kate Davis photos ©



## Bald Eagle Joins the Boys

This giant female Bald Eagle has spent the last few weeks with the Boys, Max and Nigel in the big enclosure by the river, everyone figuring out who is the top dog. She joined us from Lynn Vaught's rehabilitation center in Whitefish, a broken wrist that healed but not well enough to be released, as is so often the case. Perhaps a old gunshot wound or car collision, but now in need of placement as Lynn needed the rehab building. Plus she had a hunch that the eagle would make a fine program bird. We have applied to have her placed on our Federal permit, and in the meantime interesting interactions at feeding time each morning as Max wants everything, as is so often the case.

# Adopt a Raptor for A Year

Food Purchases: quail, heart meat  
-mice, thankfully, donated  
Freezer Space: running non-stop  
Enclosure Maintenance: perches, shade cloth, heat  
Daily Care: 365 days a year  
Insurance: to allow birds in the classroom  
Driving to Programs, etc: 13,000 miles 2009  
Web Site, Blog Page: constant updates  
Paperwork: to maintain four Federal Permits,  
correspondences, special events, sponsorship



## Teaching Team:

Golden Eagles	<i>Max</i> ~ \$ 1000
Rough-legged Hawk	<i>Nigel</i> ~ \$ 500
Swainson's Hawk	<i>Otto</i> ~ \$ 200
Rough-legged Hawk	<i>Evita</i> ~ \$ 200
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Otto</i> ~ \$ 200
Harris's Hawk	<i>Alisa</i> ~ \$ 150
Harris's Hawk	<i>Deja</i> ~ \$ 200
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Chesty</i> ~ \$ 150
American Kestrel	<i>Margo</i> ~ \$ 100
Peregrine Falcon	<i>JayDub</i> ~ \$ 75
Gyr/Peregrine hybrid	<i>Sibley</i> ~ \$ 400
	<i>Ansel</i> ~ \$ 250

Northern Saw-whet Owl	<i>Buster</i> ~ \$ 50
Barred Owl	<i>Graham</i> ~ \$ 300
Great Horned Owls	<i>Jillian</i> ~ \$ 150
	<i>Miles</i> ~ \$ 250

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

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

Sally Phillips  
Steve and Mindy Palmer  
H & H Meats  
Judy Hoy  
McLaughlin Research Institute  
U of M Laboratory Animal Resources  
Florence Veterinary Clinic  
Hamilton Packing  
Marnie Corderman  
Julia Hunt  
Bill and Gretchen Wilson  
David and Nancy Tyrell  
Allan Foss, Jan Harris Berry Patch  
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Dale Laney  
Bob Tabke and Deb Dawson  
Jeanne MacPherson & Bill Gallea  
Elizabeth McCubbin  
Richard S. Griffith  
Marty Leonard  
Abbott's Glass, John and Marna Abbott  
Kay and Bill Beebe  
Lois and Tom Hooker  
Rick and Sue Neff  
Five Valley's Audubon  
The Rapp Family Foundation

*Raptor Backer Appreciation Party:*  
Charlie Jansen and Rickie Van Berkum  
Gretchen and Bill Wilson  
Paul Stafford and Julie Chapman  
Amy Cilimburg and Rick Craig  
Mary Ann Mancini and Mary O'Connell  
Elizabeth Johnson  
Pamela Fenno  
Linda Temple  
Mike and Dani Stewart  
Ruth Lutz, Shear Prophesy  
John Salisbury  
Patrick and Bernadette Bannister  
Bob Anderson  
Steve and Mindy Palmer  
Jan and Don Burgess  
Maureen Riley and Peter Hettinger  
Nancy Seiler  
Ted Eiseman and Hannah Tribble  
Gwen Wood  
Janice and Bill Stroud  
A'Lisa Scott  
Debbie and Henry Fassnacht  
John and Kathy Heffernan

AND Special thanks to:

Jurgen Knoller at Bayern  
and Wendy Jordan at Famous Dave's!

### *Board of Directors*

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

## *Raptors of the Rockies*

P.O. Box 250, Florence, MT 59833

[raptors@montana.com](mailto:raptors@montana.com)  
[www.raptorsoftherockies.org](http://www.raptorsoftherockies.org)  
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