

RAPTORS OF THE ROCKIES

P.O. BOX 250, FLORENCE, MONTANA

Education Programs since 1988

Raptor Round-Up

www.raptorsoftherockies.org
See a color version of the newsletter
www.raptorsoftherockies.com
Photography and Book web site

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email Kate - raptors@montana.com

Fifty Years as a Junior Zoologist



1973-2023



Miracles and Maladies

The absolute highlight of my lifetime was a speaking engagement at the Cincinnati Zoo in April, with best friends at my favorite place. Unfortunately this was immediately followed by four months-plus of major maladies. I basically slept the whole summer after a "routine" total knee replacement surgery with a disastrous reaction to the anesthesia, so I am told. In 1982 I had a crash at Snowbowl and then surgery, bone on bone in the x-rays 40 years later. Symptoms in May were extreme fatigue, nausea and no appetite, anemia and a cancer scare (nope!) A long haul.

Back now, and I feel great. This Round-Up will fill you in on our year - unfortunately lots of cancellations but we did pull off some programs. A nap in the morning, then another in the afternoon, in bed by 6 p.m. Thankfully I had the energy to keep up with the birds, but not the lawn. Our friend Nancy Cook of The Pleiades Foundation wrote, "Glad you are on the mend!" Yes I am and *thanks*, especially friends at Community Hospital. See you at Snowbowl - last season I could only turn left.



Sibley in December

Her 21st season of flying, 715 programs, and 4 TV shows. Mischa her cousin, by the same breeder, is sharing the spotlight now. She is a perfect bird, mostly, and just a year old now.



New Pals

A one-year old Barred Owl was struck by a car nearby in December, and who knew they lived in the Bitterroot? Portia is our Teaching Team member now, perfect in programs. We also welcome Little Billie the Northern Saw-whet Owl and Bodie the American Kestrel. All rodent-eaters and could use your help in purchasing the little mouse-cicles. Our Program Is Supported By Your Donations



Kate Davis photos ©

The Raccoons next door!

MISSION STATEMENT

Raptors of the Rockies is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) raptor education project located in Western Montana. Four Federal and State Permits are required. Since 1988, our mission has been:

- * 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 encourage everyone to go outdoors - "Nature Therapy!"

Good-bye to Super-Hero, Owen

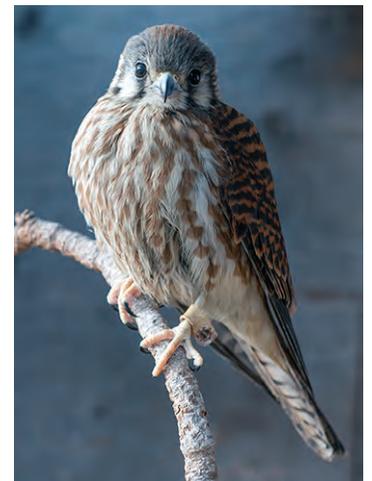
Sadly, Owen our Northern Saw-whet Owl passed suddenly last November just as I was mailing out the newsletters. He was a Hero/Superstar and Favorite during his 11 years with us. He came from another raptor center in Whitefish that closed, so true age unknown, but I believe he was several years old when he joined us. In his time as a Raptor of the Rockies, Owen thrilled and inspired thousands in 677 formal programs and tours. He often made his little vocalizations for school assemblies and Montana Public Radio. Owen had no fear of a Peregrine or Golden Eagle on a perch near-by, such a brave boy. People (always adults) would ask, "Is that how big they are?" Yes, I guess so. I think they are asking if he gets any bigger, but full grown when they fledge at 4 1/2- 5 weeks.



A full schedule programs for a while there in April, pre-knee surgery. The International Wildlife Film Festival on a Sunday afternoon at the Roxy Theater. Thanks Wes, Sib and Jillian on their best behaviors. Then a trip to Seeley Lake for Pyramid Mountain Lumber's annual get-together "Contract Logger / Landowner / Log Seller Meeting," fun group and think I kind of took them by storm, i.e. freaked them out. That Thursday was Chief Charlo Elementary and our favorite teacher Kevin Cashman, Mischa's first school (below) and Portia the Barred Owl as well. Perfect Birds! Then Lone Rock School 2nd graders here again, every spring, love you kids and teacher Julie. We'll do it all again.

Ella the Kestrel is Missed

We lost Ella over the winter, ten years of age and sister to Wes. She was inside in the brutally cold weather, and died suddenly. I can remember her calling "killy, killy, killy" as if on cue on Pea Green Boat, Montana Public Radio. She was a sweetheart and actually did lay eggs several times in a little depression in the corner, but no breeding here. Love you Ella Fitzgerald the kestrel.



LEFT: Zootown Arts Community Center, that's ZACC hosted a morning of birds and print making for kids, our first visit to the hot spot downtown Missoula (Zootown). Portia and Sibley the Peregrine were star models, watching Sib's slow motion flight video that they play at the Museum of Natural History in NYC. Rapt attention by all!



Cincinnati Zoo Frisch's Theater, What an Awesome Audience



The Cincinnati Zoo Rules the Planet Earth

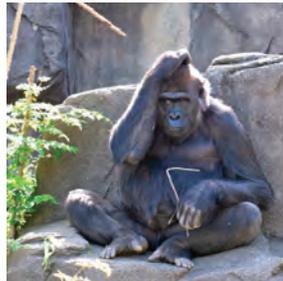
A whirlwind three days in April back at the old stomping' grounds, the Cincinnati Zoo. I was the guest speaker for the Barrows Conservation Lecture Series, several other presentations along the way as well and way too quick of a trip. Director Thane Maynard picked me up at the airport, an alligator in a container the back seat of his Subaru Crosstrek, of course. I am so appreciative of his invite after he visited the Raptor Ranch last year.

I had a few hours on my own to explore the zoo right off the bat and my first stop was to get a *map*. After that I had incredible tours by the experts, lots of new exhibits but basically the same - so very impressive and historic as the first (okay, second by a month) zoo in the country, 1875! I think my favorite animals were the Kea parrots and sloth. And giraffes and Colobus Monkeys and gorillas...oh all of them. Best was seeing all of my old pals from FIFTY years ago. We all look the same, don't we?

Thank YOU excellent staff, and for ALL for the trip of a lifetime.
Thanks especially to my home-host Dotty Shaffer and her refreshments and acupuncture!



Best Best friends from JZC Days - Cynthia Thompson, Myra Messick, me, Lesley Arnold and Cathy Jo Bens. WAY too brief of a reunion.



I think my favorite animals were the Keas, parrots from New Zealand. Very chatty siblings.

Junior Zoologists Club Recruitment

Charlie Dewey, JZC from 1969 emailed me a request in October, as he was starting the Club again after a huge hiatus. Could I offer some words of wisdom? I came up with this and dashed it off, presented to the young recruits the next day:

My life changed in the spring of 1973 when I joined the Junior Zoologists Club. That clarified my lifelong passion for animals that had started with monsters (!) and dinosaurs, then reptiles and amphibians, as many as I could catch and bring home to be returned to the wild not soon enough for my Dad. Education Director Barry Wakeman gave me the opportunity of a lifetime at age 13, when I was allowed run of the zoo with my Kate Phillips Jr. Zoologists pin. Straight away I was keeping baby raccoons, foxes, kestrels and screech owls, (and one skunk) and doing education programs at the zoo, schools and nature centers. Then I became a taxidermist, plus illustrator of publications with pen & ink drawings, even writing stories for the Cincinnati Enquirer newspaper. I gained the friendships of a lifetime, rekindled in my April return to the zoo for the Barrows Lecture Series, "50 Years as a Junior Zoologist," absolutely the highlight of this raptor fanatic's life.

I took my experiences from the zoo to Montana in 1978 and got a Zoology Degree with honors from the U. of M., a taxidermist as my profession in college and beyond. I continued my art with print making and welded sculptures, writing by authoring and illustrating seven books on raptors. But more importantly, the years spent with rehab and rudimentary falconry led me to form Raptors of the Rockies in 1988, an assembly of non-releasable and falconry birds of prey used for education. As a non-profit we have loyal "Raptor Backers" that keep us going. Our dozen falcons, hawks, eagles and owls are held at very comfortable facilities at my home on the Bitterroot River of Western Montana. We have appeared in 1880 programs for nearly 140,000 audience members, young and old alike. I also present lively Powerpoint programs across the country from Boston to Seattle, with Chicago, Salt Lake City and Detroit in between. Right now a one-year old Peregrine is perched here in the office, and her "cousin" Sibley is now 20 years old with 720 programs, 4 TV shows and still flying in falconry. No retirement planned here at Raptors of the Rockies, 36 years and going strong.

It is obvious that none of this would be possible without my years as a Junior Zoologist, right? I know that it's hard to imagine what the club was like back then, field trips every Saturday, overnight caving adventures, even a trip to Africa in 1974. This will be the 21st century Junior Zoologists Club and still the greatest experience of a lifetime, trust me.



October's program at Lewis & Clark Headquarters, Travelers' Rest State Park in Lolo was way too much fun and a milestone. I had an art display and Powerpoint, then four birds on their best behavior. Nigel the 28-year-old Golden Eagle here with me and finally feeling great after a 4-month-plus illness. I was informed that this was their largest audience ever, topped only by the annual fundraising event. 150 young and old alike, lots of familiar faces and let's do that again.



Summer 2023 - Visit by Long-time Raptor Backer Bob Ehrhart or Oregon, Flowers by Brown's Nursery of Florence, Horticulture by Tom Davis

FRIDAY, JUNE 2, 2023 MTPR

Jazz Sessions with Annie Garde (and a half dozen visitors in the studio) and our favorite record. Just kidding - this is by far the worst from the big collection at my Mom's, wonder where that came from? We started with Ahmad Jamal "Poiciana" on LP, then Oscar Peterson, Monty Alexander, Bill Evans. Guitars with Wes Montgomery and Brothers, Kenny Burrell and Jim Hall, even Brazil 66, Stanley Turrenteen, and a little Miles, "Porgy and Bess." What fun. Trip home and went to bed, big day for me as still feeling really ill and new tests at the hospital next week.



SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 2023

Mike To the Rescue!

My "No Mow May" resulted in grass up to four feet deep in our front and back yards. With knee surgery I couldn't push the mower to start with, and looked like this job must be

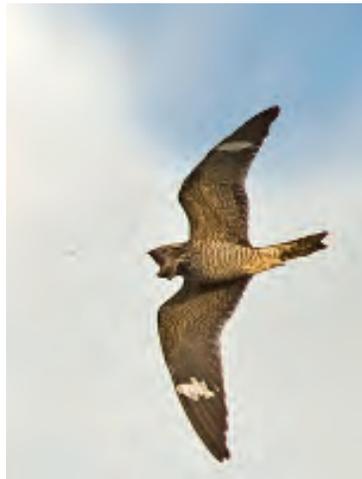


passed on to an expert. Enter neighbor Mike DeNeve from across the road where I fly Sibley, and wait for a gap in the rain. He did the whole yard and then some in just over an hour - would have taken me a week, if I could even get through that thick stuff. Doubtful. And so thankful!

MONDAY, AUGUST 21, 2023

Nighthawks At the Diner

(A great 1975 Tom Waits album) and Common Nighthawks flying by here last evening, first ones I have seen this year. These are the nightjars across the country, active at dawn and dusk - not night, and not hawks, but "hawking" insects in flight. A gregarious migrating flock lingered over the river, but I failed to get any good photos so here is an older one. I love these birds and their call, the nasal peent is a sign of summer.



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2023

End of an Era

We have been getting Netflix in the mail, DVD's waiting in the post office box for my anxious retrieval now since 2006, the first one, "Broken Flowers." We have enjoyed a total of 1567 movies and yesterday the last one, end of an era. Netflix quit sending them and said to keep these last ones as gifts, not to mail back. I am so 20th Century and just discovered Roku this week. I shall miss the disc in the box, as about three other people in the Florence Post Office have received them the last few years, archaic relics. HA! We just watched Alfred Hitchcock "The Birds" on the newly installed Roku, and a huge, noisy flock of Snow Geese landed in the river middle of the night! What dreams...



THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2023

Mrs. White of Florence

One last little program for the nearly-1st-graders and Mrs. White was explaining the wayward Opossum of Nome Alaska, Grubby. A local celebrity, he hitched a ride on a shipping container from Washington State, check it out. We did a little presentation with Mischa (in the back) and on "what skull is this?" the kids got them all with little coaching. Junior Zoologists. Have a great summer kids, and they promised they would spend it outdoors (all but one little boy, oh well.)



AUGUST 2023

Right outside the window, the swarm. The most honeybees ever and I just filled that feeder first thing this morning! Heck with that "No Mow May" leaving the dandelions in your yard for the honeybees - just load up on hummingbird feeders.



SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2023

Artists and Heroes

The 2nd graders from local Lone Rock Elementary and teacher Julie Bachman surprised us with these thank-you letters Saturday. There I am with Sibley, love the dress. And student with his favorite, Simon the Great Horned Owl who "kept staring at me." a drawing of kids in the Eagle Building, "because they are so pretty," and another artist's favorite was "when Sibley came out of her cage and the dogs came outside!"





California Quail Galore

These non-native game birds started showing up in the Bitterroot Valley starting in the early 2000's, hardy little flock birds that can survive the winters just fine. They were released by people with game farms and hunting preserves, or escaped from hobbyists (many apparently purchased from one feed store in Hamilton.) Either way, it became illegal to keep them in 2003, and it is not known if they continue to be "liberated." Either way they are here to stay. The population hotbeds are Hamilton and Stevensville with 494 and 797 birds counted respectively about ten years ago! Unlike Ring-necked Pheasants and Gray Partridge that were intentionally introduced by MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks as game birds, California Quail are not protected. I was informed that their resonating call is the shout "Chicago!"



"Our" Eagle Nest Update

With the Wasted Spring and Summer, I missed all the eagle activity at the nest across the river. Watching through the scope in the living room though I figured they had skipped the year of breeding again, no one home. Then in June, I saw the unbelievable - one big nestling. I finally made it down there one time and not again that was for sure. I wasn't ready for cross-country hiking with camera gear and this knee and anemia. Now the nest is nearly totally blocked by cottonwood limbs, and glad to have those years of easy viewing starting when they built it in 2011. Since then 21 babies have fledged, including the two in 2023. Not bad, guys.



We have a magpie nest 20 yards from where I'm sitting, a domed stick nest near the top of a Ponderosa Pine we planted 20 years ago. These birds are always the first to nest and have been rebuilding for over a week now, funny to watch in the snow squalls. I have seen 5 young, maybe 6 fledge at 30 days from that closed (safe) nest, somehow. Young have short tails, pink mouths and light-colored eyes, and they are the ones begging all summer, like this one on my metal Gyrfalcon sculpture. Lots of people don't, but I love magpies, except when they are stealing ALL of the eagles' food in their enclosure.



Peregrines around, and this snapshot with Tom on a drive through Lee Metcalf NWR, right down the road. Unfortunately I could not do my regular nest monitoring this year, just out a couple times and almost had to sleep on the way home from the Blackfoot nests. Jay Sumner of Montana Peregrine Institute reports that Montana Peregrine productivity is down more than 50% from the previous two years. He feels that it is the highly pathogenic avian flu affecting breeding, and few young seen fledging in 2023. We can only hope that this a trend and they recover soon. There is nothing on earth more impressive than watching these falcons on the nest cliffs: courtship, breeding, young testing their skills, migrating out in the fall. Then returning to the cliffs in March, and a favorite time starts up again - Peregrine Season.

Resident Red-tailed Hawks

Here is a great example of reverse sexual size dimorphism, the female raptor larger than her mate. This is the case for most raptors, plus shorebirds and even hummingbirds. The extreme is the Sharp-shinned Hawk, the male half the size of a female. In young eagles the flight feathers are longer and pointed, shorter feathers replacing them at molt and a jagged appearance on the wing and tail edge that second year. The kids are bigger than their parents!



Trapper Peak and Elk



Kate Davis photos ©

MAM-ologists!



Our 20th year of "Raptors and Art Camp" at the Missoula Art Museum and a packed house of 7-12 year old artists. Bev Beck Glueckert and I host these Ornithologists for two days of sketching sessions with our live models, then the paper mache starts a'flyin'. Bev finishes the week with a printmaking experience as only she can provide- birds and the printing press. I always get a grande finale portrait, and see you next June, the week after school gets out!



Isla's colorful drawing of Sonora the Aplomado, the falcon thinking "I can't wait to get home."



We were caring for a nest of baby American Kestrels whose nest tree was felled near Stevensville in late June. One spilled out and the next morning all were retrieved by a bird-lover neighbor. That female in the front vastly improved, the one that spent the night out on the ground. Survivor.

Her brothers all had different personalities, and we hacked them out here. Fed by dropping food through a tube in the back, I peeled back the hardware cloth at that shelf in July and they released themselves. We kept the female and tiniest male. This hacking worked for a nest of Sharp-shinned Hawks a few years ago, two of them hung out for weeks. I did see some kestrels near-by this summer. Good luck, fellows! right:Hack building



Portia, Little Billie and Bodie

Portia was retrieved from the roadside just up Three Mile, near-by here in the Bitterroot and suffering a traumatic head injury. As a young bird our Veterinarian Dr. Scott Bovard agreed that this owl would make a great addition to the "teaching team." Most young raptors die that first year: tough being a predator. Barred Owls are uncommon and have been moving into the state only in the last 40 or 50 years. So we now have a bird named for the Bard (!) of Avon, William Shakespeare and Portia from The Merchant of Venice - came to me on as the answer to a question on Jeopardy, Bard the suggestion of John Heffernan. Lofty stuff, I know.

New youngster, the one-year old Northern Saw-whet Owl was struck by a car in Kalispell in January and came to us from Beth Watne and Montana Wild Wings Recovery Center. His right wing suffered a break and not flighted. Big shoes to fill after the loss of Saw-whet Owen in November. When I placed him in his enclosure, for some reason I said in a British accent, "Little Billie! Supper's ready." Our Board thought it a fitting name.



Portia the Mellow



Little Billie the Handsome Here is a psychic story - We just had a fun visit by two volunteers from Montana Wild Wings, Jennifer Campbell and Leslie Mathern. They told me it was a fine tribute to name the owl after the woman that recovered him from the roadside, Billie. What? I just made that up and news to me! Wow, where did that come from...?

We have had a brother and sister team of kestrels here for ten years, and sadly the female Ella died over the winter. The siblings shared hundreds of programs over that decade with us. We thought that the female from the nest of youngsters recovered in June would make a nice companion for Wes the male. With the high mortality of raptors in general, and the fact that this youngster was habituated to humans, we thought she would make a great new bird. She is Wes' roommate now, getting along fine and loves her daily mouse and organic chicken from Living Farms Ranch in Stevensville.

Bodie, California is ghost town from the Gold Rush Days, and the birthplace of our grandmother on my father's side, Florence Rea (my middle name, Rea.) I always wish I was around in 1849, then I get out my camera and watch a movie. "Gotta Love a Kestrel" goes the saying, or I made that up. A friendly friend and so glad she's here.



Bodie the Survivor

Our Teaching Team Buddies

And the years they joined us



Sonora the Aplomado Falcon 2013



Little Billie the Northern Saw-whet Owl 2023



Misha the Peregrine Falcon 2022



Galen Dreger

Nigel and fancy backdrop, Travelers' Rest State Park



Simone the Red-tailed Hawk 2017



Sonny the Bald Eagle 2011



Jillian the Great Horned Owl 2003



Sibley the Peregrine Falcon 2003



Nigel the Golden Eagle 1999



Maizee the Peregrine Falcon 2021



"Flipper" Kate Davis '92
Zinc-plate etching, gouache paint 8 1/2" x 12 1/2"
Our Osprey back in Clinton, Flipper for Suzy



Bodie 2023



Wes the American Kestrels 2013

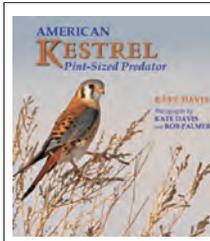
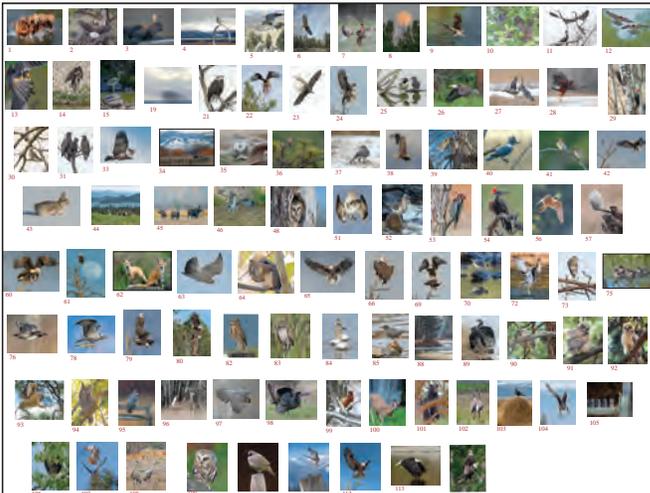


Simon the Great Horned Owl 2017



Portia the Barred Owl 2023

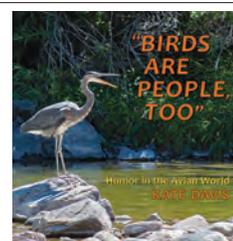
Got Cards! From us and also available at **Rockin Rudy's, the coolest place in town.** All proceeds to benefit our education outfit.
Thanks Minuteman Press, Missoula



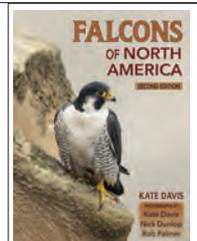
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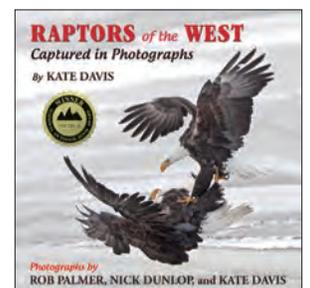
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Books available

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A portion of proceeds to benefit our education program.

Raptors of the West
Second Edition is in the works!

A dozen years of new photos by Rob, Nick and me, sold out from Mountain Press Publishing with 15,000 copies



Thank you Raptor Backers!

sponsors since last newsletter, many several times

Steve & Mindy Palmer, Rock Stars!!!

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Minuteman Press in Missoula, their generosity for RRU's in living color!

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Raptors of the Rockies

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