



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 36, NOVEMBER 2010

## Padre Island Peregrine Project: Trip to Texas

**D**on't Mess With Texas: a slogan that exemplifies pride in the state and now I know why. Their southern coast barrier islands hold the most amazing bird life to behold, including hundreds of migrating Peregrine Falcons, feeding on that bird life before heading to South America. Jay Sumner and I were privileged to spend the last week of the season at Padre, where they put us to work. The survey project started in the 1977, sponsored by Earthspan with help from the Peregrine Fund and individuals that love these birds, headed now by Gregg Doney of Helena.

181 Peregrine Falcons were banded in just over a month and nearly 8500 in their 33 year history. Not many adults (about 1/5th of the total), or haggard birds are caught, as they are a bit more savvy and "stuck up" as one biologist joked. Plus, very few males are seen, only about 10 caught this year, and a mystery as to where they go. Gregg has run the project for five years now, has been involved for fifteen, and has a new item on his list for processing the birds - checking for the presence of oil from the BP Gulf spill in collaboration with the Peregrine Fund. So far clean birds with no visible oil, but they are anxious to see about falcons returning in the spring. Blood and feather samples are also taken to check for contagious diseases, contaminant levels and geographic origins of these Peregrine migrants from the Arctic. These studies have revealed that concentrations of pesticide DDT (and it's breakdown chemical DDE) had declined dramatically by 2004. We appreciate the opportunity to experience this amazing science, other-worldly land on the sand, and hopefully will return another day.

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Above: Gregg Doney and migrant.

Right: ATVs are loaded up for an afternoon / evening survey on the sand, Tish McDaniel of NM front and center.

Below: Willard Heck releases a Peregrine that has been processed and banded. He is one of the pioneer scientists at Padre, and the leader in Peregrine Falcon propagation for reintroduction starting in the '70's with the P. Fund.

## Legendary Editors

**O**ur new book for Mountain Press Publishing with Rob Palmer and Nick Dunlop, *Raptors of the West* will be out this spring, and we are elated to have two expert reviewers on board. Senior scientist at the Peregrine Fund, Grainger Hunt wrote his Master's thesis on the Padre Peregrines in 1966. He has since studied eagles, falcons, and the California Condor, with over 50 publications and reports, several

with wife Terry who is also a biologist. Hans Peeters has been a leading artist and author in the raptor world for decades, and a friend since we met at the Woodson Birds In Art exhibition in 1993. His books (and paintings) are the best out there, and he will be helping with the owl species. I can hardly wait to see what we all come up with.



Prairie Falcon, Kate Davis photo ©



The passing of three pals:  
We honor the memory of dear friends  
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Scott Francis watches a falcon flight at his home in the Mission Mountains in Sept.

## 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 ©

This Sandhill Crane in the flowers is one of my favorite photographs of the year. Prints are available from us - alone, matted and/or framed. Gale Johnson of Custom Digital Imaging produces the best quality work out there!

Check out [www.cdiprints.com](http://www.cdiprints.com)

## Programs All Over the Place, Even Zortman



*Kat Imhoff catches Marlis the Peregrine in flight for the cattle ranchers.*

Jay Sumner and I enjoyed three days of glorious weather and flights by the Peregrines, all above the native prairie grassland of the Matador Ranch near Zortman. The Nature Conservancy owns these 60,000 acres and we had a very enthusiastic TNC staff to help us kick up the game birds, led by Director Kat Imhoff. We also flew the birds for the grass bank ranchers that share grazing privileges with the Matador. One day we hunted with young members of the Montana Conservation Corp., but missed the quarry. When I reached in my vest to retrieve a pigeon to call a falcon back, one gal let out a shriek. The last thing she expected to emerge from a pocket was a live bird, and she wondered what else was in there. "Just like Mary Poppins' bag," she informed us. A magic trick or two, and sometimes that means just coming home with your falcon.

This month we paid a visit to Dillon, and a program at the college for 75 cadets at the Montana Youth Challenge Academy. Jay and I tag-teamed with PowerPoints and Peregrines, discussing their biology, recovery and falconry. We stayed with Jack and Brenda Kirkley and hunted in the area (thanks, friends), even getting lost on the way home and a white-knuckle drive on ice, high in the mountains over the Big Hole Valley. That will teach Jay to leave me in charge of reading the map which I was gauging in kilometers instead of miles (!)

Then we had a program for Flathead Audubon in Kalispell, a capacity crowd with four birds on their best behaviors. Thanks to fellow Bird Lady Lynn Vaught of Whitefish for the hospitality and raptor stories until the wee hours of the night (or morning, actually.)



*Jay's presentation to the rapt cadets in Dillon, and male Northern Harrier in the Big Hole (right.)*



Kate Davis photos ©

# Raptor Research Foundation Symposium

I finished up my three-plus-year stint as Chair of the Education Committee with the Raptor Research Foundation with a bang. The conference this year was in Fort Collins, Colorado in September, hosted by the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program, and a huge success. I had organized a day-long "Raptors In Education" Symposium, with 13 speakers. These included extended presentations by Walter Crawford of the World Bird Sanctuary (entertaining as always) and Jemima Parry-Jones with an stirring history of her International Centre for Birds of Prey in the UK. We were also treated to discussions on the educational programs at Cornell University, Yellowstone National Park, Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group, HawkWatch International, the Cascades Raptor Center in Oregon, and the Sia Center for the Comanche Nation in Oklahoma. We also learned some secrets about falconry as reconditioning for release, raptors in free flight demonstrations, and a discussion of federal regulations by Eliza Savage from Washington, DC. My paper was about birds in art and film, packed with pictures of kids creating. I wanted to start the session on a lighthearted note, and lots of laughs about one of my favorite "thank-you" letters from a 3rd grade artist named Leonard who wrote, "Dear Kate Davis, When I am old enough to have a job, I want to be a raptor." We congratulate host Judy Scherpelz and staff for a perfect gathering and a remarkable raptor center, the finest I have ever had the privilege of touring. Way to go, guys!

Rocky Mountain Raptor Program [www.rmrp.org](http://www.rmrp.org)



Raptors in the Creative Process

Kate Davis



Kate and a hatch-year female *tundrius* Peregrine



The new Peregrine Fund 2011 calendar is now out, and Rob and Nick cover half the months with their images of raptors, plus front and inside covers like this Burrowing Owl photo by Rob that is featured in our new book.

Rob Palmer was at the meeting with his new Peregrine and we had a nice hunt on Sunday. Nick Dunlop also in attendance, and both had very popular booths to "hawk" their photographs and our *Falcons of North America* books.



Black-necked Stilts, maybe migrating from Montana.

## More Texas Tales and Tails

Willard Heck searches for Peregrines on the vast expanse of sand and "black mat" of a hardened algae bloom. Rich with other migrating birds feeding on invertebrates, the falcons appear from no where in hunting mode. We found ourselves in the middle of thousands of swallows, feeding just a few feet above the surface, fattening up for the long trip across the



Kate Davis photos ©

Gulf. Male Peregrines, one-third smaller than the females, have been observed catching the numerous giant dragonflies, a hearty diet for their similar journey. The survey team sticks to designated "highways" to get from point to point on the Honda ATV's, and I actually started to recognize certain landmarks the second day, like "Green Well Head" in the distance. This must be what the surface of Mars looks like, minus the birds.



A Tricolored Heron, birds that seem to be always racing around the shallows like crazy.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 1, 2010

## Phillips Family Reunion

A happy occasion and the first time all the kids have been together with Mom in about three years. On the left is sister Betsy Needles, owner of Heartland Caregivers, helping folks across the land with estate staffing, and brother Jonathan Phillips in the film industry. After many years with Dreamworks, he has just started his own business dubbing in languages (37 in all to be exact) to animated features for release overseas. Latest was the Shrek series and "How to Train Your Dragon" in Cantonese and 5 versions of Russian, for example. And Sally the Mom, who started this "project" 50 years ago.



TUESDAY, AUGUST 24, 2010

## Have You Ever Seen So Many Grasshoppers?

This year seems especially bad, or good depending on your perspective. Birds are loving this near plague of grasshoppers, zillions jumping in waves as we walk through the grass. Even Sibley the falcon has been chasing them on foot in her building. A bunch of Eastern Kingbirds have been using the sculptures in the lawn to launch attacks, this one off the Great Horned Owl. We had our first frost here last night and before you know it, the insect feast will be gone. And then...falconry season!



MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2010

## Get Out Your Favorite Field Guide

This photo from yesterday and I kept thinking it looked familiar in some way. It was a young Red-tailed Hawk and I only wished it had been an adult and then it would be pretty close to the cover painting by David Sibley for his *Field Guide to Birds*. A must for everyone out there that loves avian life as much as we do. I have three copies, one in the office, one in the car, and one in the library. I made this into new cards for Rockin' Rudy's in Missoula along with lots of photos, so check 'em out.



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2010

## Yesterday a Prairie Falcon, This Time A Peregrine

Today's flight of Sibley brought a young Peregrine from out of nowhere within minutes, up on a huge open hillside in the Sapphires. I got these shots of the interaction then realized I should be more concerned with my bird's safety. No problem as she just flew back to the Subaru and landed on the roof. This sport can be a bit unnerving at times.



TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2010

## Think I'll Try Oil Painting

With a tiny break in the action, I decided to finally bust out the oil paints that I've had tucked away for years and give it a try. After the *plein air* painters were here in August, I was truly inspired, and encouraged by friend and painter extraordinaire, Janet McGahan. She and husband Jerry showed me around their studios, with tips and ideas. So I stuck Sib on her perch in the living room and made my first oil painting. I'm using canola oil and cleaning brushes outside, suggestions from the McGahans. My other mentors are Julie Chapman, and of course, Bill Ohrmann. I've started a Golden Eagle, but it's still in the "ugly" stage, and we don't need Max perched in the living room for this one.



MONDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2010

## Never Bring a Knife To a Gun Fight

Unbelievably bad luck that this Northern Pygmy-Owl landed right next to me when all I had was a wide angle lens, 24 mm for photography buffs. I was involved in a migration survey in the mountains behind the house, and we heard the vocalizations of this bird. Friends Kerr and Kate work for the MPG Ranch, involved in excellent bird studies, and have seen Pygmy-Owls up there before. My camera had been acting up, not working well, so I brought the back-up and wide angle instead. Oh well, my friends got some great shots, but I had left the telephoto at home. Never do that again. We might try to fit this shot in the new book so people can ask, "Is that how big they are?" the most common question when people meet our Pygmy-Owl.



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2010

## Halloween Hunt

Jay Sumner and I were dressed as falconers yesterday for Halloween, and here Marlis the Peregrine is trying to spot a duck after a big stoop, or dive. It disappeared underwater in the slough, hiding in an ancient root wad up against the bank and breathing a sigh of relief. Sibley and Marlis flew a total of four hours, getting high on thermals and chasing game, but only one duck for dinner tonight. I remember John Craighead telling me ten years back, "If we relied on this sport to feed our families, we would have starved long ago."



# Farewell To A Dear Friend

In a September memorial filled with tears, humor, poetry and music, 400 plus friends and family of Byron Weber bid farewell to man who touched more lives than we will ever know. He tragically died of progressive lymphoma at age 65. A naturalist, teacher, athlete, and decorated Marine serving in Vietnam, Byron was a thoughtful and pensive man who never rushed to judgement. He was honored at the Florence Carlton School, where he taught from 1984 until his retirement this June. After the service, Sam Manno released 3000 ladybugs at an outdoor classroom at the school named for Byron.

Byron and I were friends for about twenty years, meeting through a mutual friend who introduced the "Bird Lady" to the "Bug Guy." He appeared every month on Montana Public Radio's Pea Green Boat children's program, cigar boxes of pinned butterflies and jars of insects under each arm. He shared his zest and appreciation of the natural world with thousands of avid fans for over twenty years. We had been doing bird programs for his students, and the last time in his classroom I commented on his menagerie of insects in aquariums and jars, first and second graders in a big circle at our feet. Byron said, sure, but one of his favorite spiders had escaped, and took a few steps to stomp at something on the floor. I figured the kids would jump a foot, but apparently they had seen that routine before. Byron gave me a wry smile I'll never forget. He loved life, all life, and we all love him. He is very much missed.



Kate Davis photos ©

Above: Byron in the classroom, giving a little lesson in democracy to students trying to decide which raptor to adopt.

Right: Sam Manno and friends of Byron release 3000 ladybugs at the new park at the school.

Left: Scott Francis and Gyrfalcon at his home, 2008

Below: Chesty the Harris's Hawk greets Ric and Toni Jinotti at the Raptor Ranch.

## In Memory of Fellow Raptorphiles



Scott Francis died of cancer at his home at age 55, surrounded by friends and family after bravely fighting this terrible illness for many years. Scott and wife Karen moved here in 2005 from California to practice his passion for falconry (and fishing) at a family home in Arlee. Jay introduced us and I quickly grew to respect his advice on falconry, and loved his stories and company. I only wish I could have had more days in the field with him, as every moment has been treasured. The Archives of Falconry at the Peregrine Fund in Boise is erecting a plaque in his honor, on the Wall of Remembrance, a monument to those that have made a special contribution. Everyone that ever met Scott will agree that he was a true leader in the sport, and a tragic loss.



Ric Jinotti passed at age 60 quietly at his home with long-time caregiver, sister (and saint) Toni. He had suffered from multiple sclerosis for many years, an illness triggered by exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. We were falconry friends, and he gave us the love of his life Chesty the Harris's Hawk in 2003. She got her name from Chesty Puller, the most decorated marine in history, and Ric was also decorated and very proud of his military service. Chesty never forgot her "dad" and they shared a very special bond until the end.



Kate Davis photo ©

Black Stilts and an odd duck- a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck in Texas



Jay and Peregrine Marlis with the Montana Conservation Corps on the Highline

## School Number

### 120, Ovando Rules!

We had a great morning with the students at Ovando, up the Blackfoot River and a community that we love dearly. All 13 students from the Ovando School were in attendance along with parents and friends for a falconry demonstration with Sibley. She got up high, looked for ducks in the creek and ended up with a Chukar that we served her, all observed by the gang and photographed on cameras and cell phones. We thank sponsors, Nina and Pat Brock who have the most beautiful Peregrine eyrie right next to their house at Chamberlain Creek. Hey, our 120th school, too!



Miles the Great Horned Owl with all of the Ovando School students at the Rolling Stone Ranch

## Rough-legs: Our Residents for the Winter



We have been greeted by myriads of Rough-legged Hawks lately, that time of year. Migrating down from their arctic breeding territories, they seek wintering ground that reminds them of home: open-country grasslands and marshes. Years ago, Rough-legs near Ronan were found to share "communal roosts" with up to 250 individuals sleeping in one area. Research suggests that these serve as "information centers" allowing some hawks to find food locally by following successful hunters. They often perch on these tiny limbs and twigs, impossible-looking perches for such big birds and a way to tell them from Red-tails, who prefer a more substantial substrate.



### Northern Pygmy-Owls Also Move In

Another raptor that we are more likely to see in the winter is the Pygmy-Owl, but not because they migrate south from the arctic. Instead, these birds move altitudinally down into valleys in the winter, and often frequent bird feeders which act as smorgasbords. They are incredible predators, active during the day, and capable of killing birds and mammals twice their size. "False eyes" (ocelli) on the back of the head may keep mobbing birds from getting too close. They also may fool a kleptoparasite that hopes to steal a Pygmy-Owl's meal, giving the impression that the owl is looking right at them, so no surprise theft. Welcome the Pygmy-Owl to your yard this winter.

Kate Davis photos ©



## Ohrmann Museum and Gallery Open House December 11 & 12th

Visit with the Ohrmann family and view Bill's new paintings, pick up a gift for the holidays and see his wood carvings, bronzes, and of course welded steel animals. From 11 am until 5 p.m.

**The Ohrmann Museum and Gallery,  
located 2 1/2 miles south of Drummond,  
on Scenic Highway 1**

# Adopt a Raptor for A Year



Max the Golden Eagle

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

*We heartily thank our over 200 Raptor Backers each year that make this program a reality. With this last newsletter for 2010, a reminder that adoptions are popular holiday gifts.*

## Teaching Team:

Golden Eagles	Max ~ \$ 1000
	Nigel ~ \$ 500
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 Saw-whet Owl	Buster ~ \$ 50
Northern Pygmy-Owl	iPod ~ \$ 75
Barred Owl	Graham ~ \$ 300
Great Horned Owls	Jillian ~ \$ 150
	Miles ~ \$ 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*

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*And Special Thanks to  
the Grounded Eagle  
Foundation*

Note Cards are available from us and at Rockin' Rudy's in Missoula. Over 100 different images and all proceeds to benefit our program!

### *Board of Directors*

*Kate Davis - Executive Director  
Deborah Richie Oberbillig  
Kathy Heffernan  
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We appreciate the hospitality of our friends at the Pleasant Valley Homeowners Association for beautiful falcon flights in our own backyard.



Kate Davis photos ©

A view from the ATV on the beach at Padre. Camera is safely stowed in the Pelican case strapped to the front. There are Peregrines out there somewhere.

## Raptors of the Rockies

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