



Raptors of the Rockies

P.O. BOX 250, FLORENCE, MT 59833

Educational Programs since 1988

Raptor Round-Up

www.raptorsoftherockies.org
See a color version of the newsletter

NUMBER 37, APRIL 2011

Raptors of the West Captured in Photographs

Welcome Back, Spring!



photo by Kate Davis ©



Just chat with most folks around here for the last five months and the topic has been the conditions out-of-doors. The famous quote by Mark Twain figures in, "Everybody complains about the weather but nobody does anything about it." Huge snow, high winds, and cloudy skies may inspire some complaints and threats to move to Arizona, but around here the skiers have been happily pleased with fun on the slopes and still not a rock to found. Snowbowl in Missoula had a deep-powder epic opening day in November, and closes in mid-April, a record.

Remember a few newsletters ago when I announced that our new book was done? Well, now it officially is and has been sent to the printers. This is almost exactly two years since I started collecting the photographs from Rob Palmer, Nick Dunlop and me, April 1st 2009. I wrote the captions over the summer, 420-something to be almost exact. Our publishers, Mountain Press Publishing in Missoula tell us to be patient for a few months, then it will hit the stands with great hoopla. We even have a book signing scheduled in Massachusetts. This is the last photo added by designer Jeannie Nuckolls, a Northern Goshawk image. That makes 430 images of raptors (with one of the photographers), 45 species from Burrowing Owl to Bald Eagle and California Condor, 250 pages, and an affordable \$30 with a portion of proceeds going to our organization. The happiest note is the back cover blurb written by Tom Cade, founder of the Peregrine Fund and hero to all of us:

The sub-zero temperatures have meant another tactic at the Raptor ranch, with birds in the house in kennels and on perches when the frosty temperatures were most severe. The two little owls, JayDub the Kestrel, and Sibley the Peregrine all found solace inside. We accidentally had one hawk on top of the refrigerator for a minute or two, and a menagerie with the two dogs and two cats. The Harris's Hawks enjoy heat in their buildings but still fly every day like the photos below and on page 7 of Chesty. Everyone else just stays out of the wind, with visqueen stapled up for the winter and mice and quail heated up by the wood stove. We love winter, but welcome back spring!

"To gaze into the deep, brown eyes of a falcon is to see one's own being reflected in the life of another creature. The images in this collection will excite your imagination, edify you, and hold you enraptured, as you view our western raptors in their natural landscapes."



photos by Kate Davis ©

TOTALS FOR 2010

Programs	70
Audience numbers	4405 kids and adults
Miles on the Subaru	15,374

Meet the new Long-eared Owl, Read about the Famous Bald Eagle, and check out the Tower of Power...inside!



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.

A Very Sad Friday

After a long life as an educator and inspiration to tens of thousands of children and adults, Buster the Northern Saw-whet Owl has passed of what we think could have been a heart attack; quietly eating a mouse and five minutes later dead. He joined us in 1999 as a youngster with a wing droop, and became a program favorite instantly, nearly always on his best behavior. He was also very vocal, with his whistling call lasting long hours into the night. He is missed as we remember all of the reactions by audiences upon seeing such a "cute" little predator. He was a star for as long as it takes a kindergarten child to go through the grades and graduate from high school.



Kate Davis photo ©

Buster made us smile for 12 years.

Two Trips to Boise

About 120 people interested in Gyrfalcons, ptarmigans, and climate change converged at Boise State University in Idaho in February. This was a rare combination of experts in raptors, grouse, habitat monitoring, and weather prediction. Sponsored largely by The Peregrine Fund, about a dozen countries were represented, including Alaska (little joke.) Here, Svetlana Mechnikova of Russia discusses changes in populations and nesting ecology of Gyrfalcons in Russia, complete with headphones and a translator for the anglos. It was almost like being at the U.N. She touched on a falcon nest box program (here on the big screen) and Nick Dunlop's question at the end was the best of the week: "How can we help fund your project?" A blushing Svetlana shyly accepted all of the \$20 bills from attendees after her talk, promising she'll let us know how it goes on the Yamal peninsula on the other side of the globe.



As a grand finale to our conference, we were treated to viewing another northern hemisphere falcon, the Merlin. Our good friend, biologist Bruce Haak has been studying local Merlins for over a decade, and Rob Palmer and I accompanied him on an urban trapping expedition. The subtleties of identifying the three sub-species is confusing for most of us, but Bruce has it down to an art. He caught this male Black Merlin (*suckleyi*) right away, and showed us their characteristic plumage traits. Definitive feature - on their last primary feather (number 10) the white spots don't extend anterior to the rachis, and are present on the main part only. Got it? You will be quizzed.



Another trip to the Archives of Falconry and World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise in March, and this time for a wonderful tribute to nine falconers that have passed and are sadly missed. Jay Sumner and I made the trek to Idaho, of course stopping to look at cliffs along the way and back, hoping to find breeding Peregrines. Beth Waterbury at the Salmon Fish and Game Office informed us that we are two weeks early to spot these migrant falcons, but that didn't stop Jay. No Peregrines but a nice raven and a few pigeons, that made us pull off to the side of the road to scope! Oh well.

We came to salute the life of our dear friend Scott Francis, accompanied by family and friends from afar. Above, John Swift stands at the Wall of Remembrance for falconers, and we celebrated the lives of those honored on Saturday. Scott passed in September and his words of wisdom in this sport and love of raptors resonate. I included a story he told me in an article I just wrote about the sport of falconry:

Maybe sport isn't the correct term, as it is more like an all-consuming lifestyle with a rather small following, and rightly so. A major player in the pastime was asked by his then-girl-friend in college, "When will you get over this hawk stage?" which spelled the end of their relationship. Most of us became enthralled with birds of prey as kids, hooked for life, and "Enraptured with Raptors."

A Big Bald Eagle With a History



Our 40 foot eagle enclosure came in handy recently, housing this Bald Eagle for a week before cutting her loose at the Raptor Ranch. Probably struck by a car, she was retrieved near Hot Springs by Dale Becker, Director of the Wildlife Program at the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and brought to us. She jumped out of the kennel and joined Max and Nigel the Golden Eagles on their tall perch, so recovering nicely from that probable concussion. Our boys looked puny next to the new eagle. At day six, Rob Domenech, Director of Raptor View Research Institute came by to take measurements and collect blood to test for lead poisoning, and neighbor Keri Petrilli got these great shots of the whole process. With the hood off, she flew straight into the wind and snow and disappeared up river. Rob reported the USGS band number on her leg and found this out: She was caught by biologists Riley and Pat McClelland as a young of the year on McDonald Creek in Glacier National Park in 1986. They fit her with a tail radio transmitter,

and she spent her first winter around Kalispell on the Flathead River. She migrated back to her "natal" ground in Saskatchewan that spring, where she molted those tail feathers and the transmitter was recovered on the 4th of July. She is a whopper at 12 1/2 pounds, a Canadian import, and one with a great history and successful release. And 25 years old!



Left: The "scientists", Kate and Tom Davis plus Rob Domenech of Raptor View taking measurements in the garage, and release below.



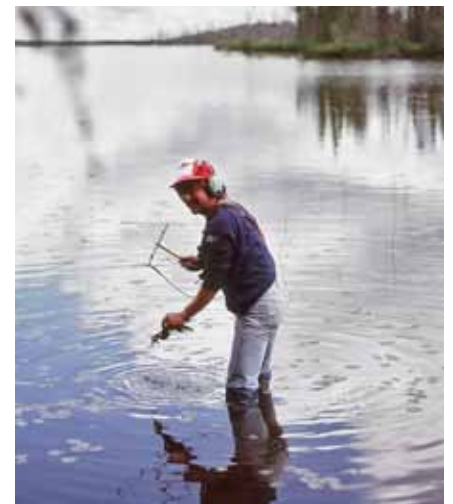
Glacier National Park, November 24, 1986 and the freshly trapped young Bald Eagle, 11 pounds.



Keri Petrilli photos ©



Elaine Caton attaches a radio transmitter to the center tail feathers. The eagle was tracked all winter, spending time along the Flathead River. Twenty five years later, she was picked up by Dale Becker near that same area!



McClelland photos ©

The tail feathers were molted the following spring, with the radio transmitter still attached, and were retrieved by son Terence McClelland in a lake in Saskatchewan, over 700 miles to the north of where she was trapped, on the 4th of July 1987.

Montana Peregrine Institute - *Peregrine Watch*

Have you ever had a dream of sitting in a lawn chair with binoculars and a spotting scope, staring at a cliff for hours and hours, contributing to science? Do we have a volunteer opportunity for you! If you would like to help out with monitoring breeding Peregrine numbers in the state, contact us or Jay Sumner, and we'll put you to work. Up from zero nests in the early 1980's to 88 known breeding territories last year, the job of keeping an eye on these birds has gotten daunting for those involved. *Occupancy* means that two falcons are present on a cliff, often harassing any other raptor that flies by and big courtship flights. Exciting! Then incubation for the month of May. Nothing, so you have the month off. *Productivity* might be your favorite, looking for babies on the ledge and then fledglings chasing their parents, usually around July 6th or so. Contact us or Jay Sumner at

peregrine@blackfoot.net



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2010

Shhhhhh! Don't Tell Annie

We are on Montana Public Radio's Pea Green Boat this afternoon, and I am giving host and pal Annie Garde this framed photo as a present. It's a snapshot of Sibley a few weeks ago with the Rocky Mountain Front as a backdrop. The temperature hovered around zero and she protested by perching on a pole and pulling up a foot. Every year we give Annie a little gift, a few years ago the contents of a dissected owl pellet. The mouse bones were carefully glued into place on cardboard and labelled, ready for display. I thought she might scream to see a skeleton in the studio, but she loved it and it may still hang on her refrigerator door.



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2010

Alisa Turns Rufous Before Our Very Eyes

Our beloved Red-tailed Hawk Alisa has a very different appearance now than last year at this time (check the blog posting for Dec. 12, 2009.) As she molted over the summer, her new feathers came in much darker which made me reach for my Brian Wheeler book, *Raptors of Western North America*. She appears to be an intermediate (rufous) morph Western Red-tail. Some biologists call these "variants" but whatever the terminology, they are confusing, especially in the field. Then you mix in the Harlan's Hawks that are appearing all over this winter, a darker phase Red-tail from Alaska, and dark Rough-legs, wow! We'll just call her a Red Red-tail.



MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 2011

Ravens At Play

Over the weekend, skiers at Snowbowl were treated to quite a sight if they were observant enough. We counted at least 25 Common Ravens swooping, diving, soaring and chasing each other in the frigid air above Point Six to the north of the ski area. Ravens, as well as hawks, eagles and falcons are often very playful, described by Brown and Amadon as, "actions which seem to reflect an exuberance of physical well-being or vitality, carried out without any immediate biological goal." They sure weren't feeding, and a bit early for breeding rituals. They, like us, were just playing! This photo from five years ago is Danica the raven, and we are still finding objects that she stole and stashed in the wood pile. These are the smartest of birds, and it got her in trouble constantly.



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2011

Fastidious Flicker

Yesterday, I noticed dirt flying in the backyard and found this Northern Flicker's head poking out of a hole in the ground. She was digging out big ant hill, and had drilled almost a foot down in the loose soil. She'll have to find another food source in the next few days with "winter storm warnings," "powerful arctic storm," and high winds, sub-zero temperatures. Looks like we'll have some birds back in the house soon!



WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2011

Max Returns to Target Range

Twenty years ago, Max the Golden Eagle had his debut program at Target Range Elementary School, and yesterday he returned for our first assembly of the year. The birds were on their best behaviors for the 475 students, kindergarten through 5th grade. I'll never forget Max's first time out, trying to hold him on a huge fortified leather welding glove, the giant eagle falling forward and backward, whacking me with his wings, the entire school in hysterics. It was a deeply humiliating experience (just kidding.) I quickly made a plan to have Max leap from a cardboard box to a perch on the edge, and that lasted exactly three programs until the box got wet hauling it into a school in Ronan, and Max leapt out on the way home. Loose in the car, I had a nervous 5 mile drive to the next highway exit, extra memorable as my Mom was a passenger! After that I built a plywood container with wheels and handles, padded perches along the top, and it has worked like a dream.



FRIDAY, JANUARY 28, 2011

Back to Fine Arts 401

I took this same drawing class in this room 32 years ago, and now we were the guests of instructor Beth Lo. Miles the Great Horned Owl and Alisa the Red-tail stood patiently on the perches for two hours, models for the afternoon. Students broke out the oil pastels, and created some colorful pieces that were displayed at the end. I couldn't resist popping in next door and checking out the printmaking lab, where I explored zinc plate etching with Professor Don Bunse in 1989.

Two days a week I took off early from the taxidermy shop where I worked, and Don taught me his secrets. I decided I'd be an artist when I grew up. Imagine all of the fine artwork that come out of those two rooms since then!



TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2011

Sibley Swoops at MPG

Yesterday we had a falconry demonstration for the half dozen biologists that were working at the MPG Ranch across the Bitterroot River from the house. Sib had some nice swooping and diving in the high winds, with a small gasp from the crowd when she flew inches away. Show off. Jeff Clarke got this photo and you have to zoom in and see the admirers standing in a half circle around her, reflected in her eye! What a shot.

We were back for a demonstration last day of hunting season for a few dozen onlookers, and a perfect flight from about 800 feet up to a hen pheasant. That's it for Sib until August, as she has the summer off to molt, and relax.



Sibley Photo Makes It Big

This photo taken on my Mom's birthday of February 28th will appear in the new brochure for Yosemite National Park. They contacted me about a flying Peregrine image, and I sent them the brand new snapshot, just taken at the MPG Ranch across the river. They looked at our photography web site, but that was the one they wanted. I wrote them back: "Carla: It would be an honor to have my photo in your brochure. My father was a devotee of the park, his favorite place on earth and we have some of his black and white photographs from Yosemite in our living room. El Capitan and Half Dome. Plus, we have a Gyrfalcon named Ansel Adams!" Carlos Phillips, my photography mentor, my first hero, and dad, would be so proud.

Check out the photography web site, compliments of Dale Simmons, EzPics, easy to remember: www.raptorsoftherockies.com



Kate Davis photos ©



Red-tailed Hawk hunting in the snow.

Our Special Guest at Bayern



BT Lubinski photo ©

Our Raptor Backer Party at Bayern Brewing boasted a "Special Guest." Fortunately she didn't have any previous engagements and could make it. Nine year old Maya Heffernan, daughter of board members Kathy and John stole the evening with her "Reasons to Adopt a Raptor" one-liners. As each bird came up, she stated her opinion on why you needed to have this photo hanging on your wall. My favorites were for Ansel the Gyrfalcon: "because he is so talented that he can pick up tennis balls with his feet," and Graham the Barred Owl: "Sponsor Graham because he is the only male bird EVER to lay an egg!" Thanks Maya and friends for attending. See you next year, first Saturday of Spring.

Upcoming Public Raptor Programs:

Monday, May 9 Five Valleys Audubon: Join us for a return to the monthly Five Valleys Audubon program, 7:30 p.m. at the U of M Gallagher Business Building, L 14. Free and open to the public, with four birds and a little Powerpoint with lots of raptor images.

Saturday, May 14 Junior Duck Stamp Awards: Visit with some birds and meet the young artists. This gala annual event is held at Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, outdoors at the amphitheater. Raptors program at 1:30, and ceremony to follow. Free and open to everyone.

Saturday, May 21 Birds And Art for Grown-Ups, The Missoula Art Museum, from 11:00-1:00 p.m., sketching sessions with three of our perfect models. 728-0447 for details.

Monday-Thursday, June 20-24 Birds And Art for Kids at MAM, 10 AM - 12 PM / Ages: 7-12 / Fee: \$54/60 non-members This popular four day class teaches you how to make fantastic sculptures from real life bird models. Campers study and observe live raptors, make drawings and studies, then life-sized papier-mâché avian friends. With Bev Glueckert and contact the MAM at 728-0447.

Tuesday, June 28 Missoula Public Library Family Reading Program: Fun for parents and school age kids, our yearly trek to the Missoula Public Library with a car load of birds and books. Begins at 2 p.m. sharp, limited space to free tickets available before.

Saturday, August 6 Bannack State Park: We return to our favorite park, Bannack Ghost Town in the Big Hole Valley near Dillon. Free program starts in the campground at 2 p.m.



Nigel the Golden Eagle

Assemblies All Over!

The birds and I have been on a campaign to reach a bunch of schools and have had elementary assemblies far and wide, starting with Saint Joseph's, Paxson, Target Range, and Lewis and Clark. Next, Bonner, Missoula International School, Hawthorne, Franklin, and a favorite pictured here: Woodman, nine miles up Lolo Creek, built in 1892, and 45 proud students! We also plan to install a kestrel nesting box in the excellent habitat, and hope a falcon pair finds it this spring. We are building more boxes, so let us know if you would like one.



Degas the Long-eared Owl is Pretty as a Picture



Kate Davis photos ©

We had been caring for this bird since November, the luxury of having a big enclosure vacant at the time, and he is now on our Education Permit. Our latest teaching team member Degas is a one-year old Long-eared Owl that was found last fall at near-by Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge with a badly broken wing. Once again, rehabber Judy Hoy to the rescue with splints and tape and voila, nearly as good as new but with some soft tissue damage. He began his career as an educator at Lewis and Clark School and on Montana Public Radio, Pea Green Boat, and so far, so good. I got this photo on Thanksgiving, a day I was thankful to have this healthy (and spunky) young owl in our care. His name Edgar Degas is that of my favorite French impressionist painter. He looks like a lovely rendering in pastel or oils.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 2011

U of M Flight Lab's Tower of Power

Sibley the Peregrine and I paid a visit to the University of Montana Flight Lab in March for an experiment with Brandon Jackson, a Post-Doctoral Fellow. The "Tower of Power" is a chamber with collapsible walls, lined with super-high speed cameras and lights, 28 feet tall. It gives Brandon a venue to measure vertical flight performance. Flying straight up vertically from a perch is not easy for a bird of Sibley's size, and gives Brandon a measure of extreme performance. I placed her on the "force plate" perch, to measure take-off power, and ran up the stairs to call her with a tidbit from above. Up she went for two bouts, nearly the entire way, but she ran out of steam near the top and she climbed the netting flapping the whole way to receive her treat. Heather Davis recorded the whole sequence for the University of Montana Flight Lab Facebook page. By the way, the force plate revealed that the energy she used to push off and launch was 4 1/2 times her body weight.



Heather Davis photos ©

See the video on our Blog page: <http://raptorsoftherockies.blogspot.com/> It's "Awesome!"



Kate Davis photo ©

Riverside Health Care Osprey Nest and Web Cam

Fingers are crossed that the Osprey family at Riverside will return soon, and a brand new camera was installed last month. Heiko Langner of the University's Environmental Biochemistry Lab and Erick Greene at Biological Sciences head up "Project Osprey." They are interested in the species and numbers of fish taken, as well as toxins affecting bird health, plus the babies in the nest will be banded. We are "killing two birds..." so to speak with science and entertainment, as the residents at Riverside Health Care love to catch the antics at the nest. They are treated to both watching the ospreys from their patio as well as live on the television indoors, via web camera. We are working on getting a high definition television right now, if you have one laying about. Tammy Talley, Executive Director at Riverside has done an amazing job of making certain that the system is top-notch, and we know that the residents as well as osprey fans from around the globe can now watch exactly what goes on with a family of "Fish Hawks." A live link will be on our web site, so stay tuned!

Adopt a Raptor for A Year



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

Over half of our dollars come from doations from individuals and businesses, plus sponsorship in the form of an adoption. Brighten your home with a photo of one of our friends on the Teaching Team.

Chesty the Harris's Hawk, a desert bird in the snow

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 Pygmy-Owl	iPod ~ \$ 50
Long-eared Owl	Degas ~ \$ 100
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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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
Kate Stone
Karma Beal
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Keith Fialcowitz
Michael and Ginny DeNeve
Becky and Stan Duffner
Dan Fruechte !
John and Marna Abbott
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