



**Raptors of the Rockies**  
 P.O. BOX 250, FLORENCE, MT 59833  
*Celebrating 25 Years of Education Programs*

# Raptor Round-Up

[www.raptorsoftherockies.org](http://www.raptorsoftherockies.org)  
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[www.raptorsoftherockies.com](http://www.raptorsoftherockies.com)  
 Photography and book web site

NUMBER 43, MAY 2013

## Bald Eagle Empire



**B**ald Eagles have made it back big time, and quite the conservation success story. South of the 40th parallel, the species was affected by the widespread and vigorous use of the pesticide DDT after World War II, and Bald Eagles were declared endangered in 1967. In the '70's, just a dozen nests existed in the big state of Montana, and now we see them flying through downtown Missoula on the Clark Fork River, removed from the Endangered List in 2007. They are early breeders and their giant stick nests on waterways are rather easily surveyed (especially if you have an airplane, and fly before the trees leaf out.) Today, the Montana Bald Eagle Working Group reports over 650 nests, and like Ospreys, they made it back without captive breeding reintroduction, just the banning of DDT and strict protection. Right on!



Kate Davis photos ©

## Winner Audubon Top 100 for 2012

This just fledged Bald Eagle was being mobbed by a tiny Bullock's Oriole, a bird that weighs a whopping 37 grams. The raptor fled in terror, crashing through a cottonwood and almost swallowing a limb. He didn't realize that he could just open his mouth, and kept swiping at it with his feet! Attack sequences are in the new book.

## Spring is Springing

**A**fter a fairly lackluster winter, some big snows came late and had us worrying about Peregrines with eggs on their ledges. These rooster Ring-necked Pheasants have been duking it out in the yard, and fortunately Chesty hasn't noticed them when she's flying around. Rumor has it that this photo will be on the cover of Pheasants Forever Magazine. Thanks Tom for alerting me to this skirmish by the fence, and for putting the dogs inside. Watch out for those spurs!



## 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.

## Prints Galore!

We have collected all of the framed prints from the Holter Museum Exhibition and two more in Missoula, so have lots of photographs for your walls if you are interested. Our pals at Burnich Frame and Moulding supply these custom jobs, and even help me pick out mat colors. Thanks Becky, Gary and Jim! This photo is an exceptionally light-colored Short-eared Owl with the Bitterroots as a backdrop. She didn't want to fly with a falcon in the air, but Sibley paid no attention.

[www.raptorsoftherockies.com](http://www.raptorsoftherockies.com)  
Photography web site, thanks EzPics



# Return to the Washington Coast

Dan Varland is the perfect host and Executive Director of Coastal Raptors, for which I serve as a board member. Nick Dunlop, Rob Palmer and I met up on the Washington Coast for the second year running, to see what we could see through the lenses of our cameras. We were not disappointed with perfect weather and Peregrines on the beach. We were goofing off doing a group shot, all of us pointing different directions as a joke at the suggestion of Nick when, no kidding, a Peregrine flew right overhead and then the real shooting began. Coastal Raptors had just released a Gyrfalcon that had been trapped, and what luck. That first Peregrine was joined by another and then the aerial battle began, shutters blaring like machine guns. It was all over in minutes, and the falcons headed out over the waves, cacking and scrapping, fleeing from the paparazzi. The throngs of beachcombers were dumbfounded, walking by and either thinking we were all crazy or perhaps, not paying any attention at all and never looking up above the sand at their feet.

That Gyrfalcon had been trapped and banded on the beach seven years earlier to the day! One particularly photogenic bird called WZ for the bands on his leg posed for millions of shots by the three of us. Check out Dan's recent interview on NPR's BirdNote and it will feel like you are right there on the coast.

TOP RIGHT: Nick's idea, everyone point different directions for the group shot, then *incoming!* That's Rob on the right.

RIGHT: A Bald Eagle stands atop a homemade weather vane.

RIGHT LOWER: A Peregrine stoop on a flock of shorebirds (Dunlins) and score. He dispatched the meal in a couple of bites, then took a nice bath in a freshwater creek flowing into the ocean.

RIGHT: A one-year old Peregrine on a root wad. I was corrected last year when I called it driftwood. HA! You have to see these in color on our web site!



Kate Davis photos ©



COASTAL  
RAPTORS





The American Kestrel Partnership held our their first meeting at the Peregrine Fund in Boise in January. I spent two days at the World Center for Birds of Prey (and one day trapping Merlins and flying falcons with my pal Bruce Haak, what a treat.)

Thirty kestrel enthusiasts shared research ranging from toxicology to migration to public education. The plans are to discover why this enigmatic species is suffering long-term

population declines. The hardest hit are kestrels in New England with drops of 88%; it is rare to spot a kestrel these days in the Mid-Atlantic, a bird that was considered the most numerous raptor in North America. Matt Giovanni heads this ambitious campaign to coordinate both professional research biologists and citizen scientists, with a goal to hopefully increase kestrel numbers in a nest box program.

Matt invites you to join the network of kestrel lovers and check out their extraordinary web site for nest box plans and details. Or buy a box from The Peregrine Fund.

<http://kestrel.peregrinefund.org/>

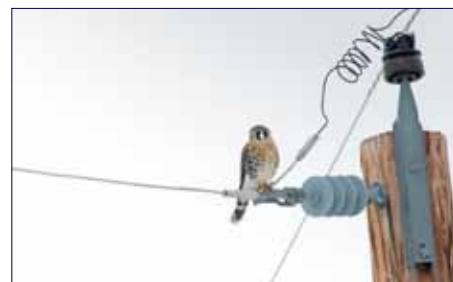
I am hoping that "our" kestrels in the nest I watched all last spring make it back. Interestingly enough, we learned that 70-80% of pairs have a different mate the subsequent year. I don't know why I thought it was the same two birds year after year...Anyway, I am hoping to have American Kestrels as the subject of the NEXT book, teaming up with Rob Palmer for photos.



Kate Davis photos ©

ABOVE: Peregrine Fund President and CEO J. Peter Jenny addresses the biologists in the Falconry Archives. By the way, Pete has a degree in Zoology from the University of Montana too! A bit before mine.

BELOW: The Snag, an ancient cottonwood nearby that fledged six kestrels last year, and a ton of starlings. It will hopefully be full of falcons again this year.



BOTTOM: A sequence of shots of a hover-hunting male kestrel that I made into bookmarks to send to Matt at the P Fund. The BLOG says, "Look at all of those kestrels!"



## Upcoming Public Raptor Programs:

**Saturday, May 4 Youth Conservation and Education Expo:** Teller Wildlife Refuge, Slack Barn, A full day of activities for kids from toddlers to 18 years of age. Dozens of sponsors including the Elk Foundation, FWP, Ducks Unlimited, Backcountry Horseman, Bitterroot Land Trust, Trout Unlimited, WOW! Begins at 10 p.m. Kicking off with a salute, a song, and then a Raptors Program, FREE for ALL.

**Saturday, May 25 The Loon and Fish Festival:** We return to Seeley Lake as the keynote for their big two-day festival. One hour program at noon followed by a book signing at 1 pm. Location to be announced, but we'll be the ones with the big Red-tailed Hawk on a glove.

**Monday-Thursday, June 11-14 Birds And Art for Kids:** Missoiula Art Museum, 10 AM - 12 PM / Ages: 7-12 / 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.

**Saturday, August 10 Bannack State Park and Ghost Town:** we love Bannack, and a program every two years. In the beautiful Big Hole Valley outside of Dillon. 2 pm in the campground. Free and open to ghost town and raptor lovers from everywhere.

**Saturday, Sept. 7 Raptor Festival:** We are excited to finally be able to present at the Lone Pine State Park Raptor Festival in Kalispell, so join us for a program, free and open to all ages. Meet some birds!

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2012

### Creative Caching

Our resident Saw-whet Owen has a decorative streak, as seen here with his placement of mouse hindquarters. He gets 3 or 4 small mice a day and always eats the front half first (or just the head, yum) then caches the rest. All owls do this; falcons as well. They will return to eat the rest later on unless their caretaker brings a fresh batch the next day. Owen's flair for decoration is seen here, as five mouse butts and one whole gray one are woven into the hardware cloth and stacked on the limb, a work of art.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2013

### Spring is Here!

How fitting that we catch a glimpse of the first bluebird of the season on the first day of spring. This guy is just back from wintering south and perhaps missed our biggest snowfall of the season here in Florence - yesterday! A Western Bluebird male was checking out my metal Great Horned Owl sculpture in the yard, thinking perhaps it was a fancy nesting box. Dozens of those real (wooden) ones line the property. Help out swallows, bluebirds and kestrels with a nest box today!



MONDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2012

### Happy New Year!

These are the last rays of light of this wonderful year of 2012, nice clouds over the Bitterroots to the west; a little bit of snow and Luna the cat to the right. Thanks to all of our Raptor Backers!

Totals for 2012:

56 programs for  
4711 participants, young and old. *Merci My Friends!*



MONDAY, APRIL 8, 2013

### Bad, Evil Sunroof

For some unknown reason, Chesty the Harris's Hawk has a new fixation with car roofs, specifically the 2003 Subaru sunroof. She has spent hours hopping between the two cars, trying to break into one. I just looked and a bunch of owl bookmarks were laying on the seat below. Coincidence, I'm sure, but keeps her out of trouble. She turns 22 this year, flying the property the last 6 years, rain or shine, or snow!



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2013

### Bitterroot Audubon Raptor Tour

Thanks to organizer Leslie Nyce, and grand raptor expert Steve Hoffman, Director of Montana Audubon for a stellar day in the field. Counts were in the twenties for Red-tails and Rough-legged Hawks. We also observed AMKE's (American Kestrels), Bald Eagles, a Northern Harrier and a one-year old Golden Eagle high above - great spotting Becky Peters! You win. Highlight was a great view of a Harlan's Hawk, subspecies of Red-tail wintering here from central Alaska. A big, black, gorgeous bird. We even watched a very distant Rough-leg transform itself into a Red-tailed Hawk before our very eyes. A miracle. Disagreements and arguments on identification were very amicable, mostly.



MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2013

### Ansel Wants Babies

Our utterly handsome male Gyrfalcon/Peregrine hybrid has decided it's time to reproduce, with his constant *chupping* day and night. Ansel made this nest scrape, a depression in the corner of his enclosure a month ago, but not mating with his roommate the female Red-tailed Hawk. Never happen. He is an imprint 9 year-old, combo male black phase Gyrfalcon and female Peale's Peregrine Falcon produced by artificial insemination. For the kid's programs, we just say he's a Gyr to avoid discussions of the process of collecting semen and, well, you know...





## Pick Up That Baling Twine, Please <sup>5</sup>



Another victim of the contaminant DDT, Ospreys have made it back since it was banned in 1972. Allen Poole writes "Phoenix-like, the Osprey has arisen from the ashes of its own demise, a survivor, even a backyard bird in some areas." They are tolerant of people and love these artificial platforms ..and cell phone towers.

Ospreys love to decorate and line their nests with objects not found in nature, and a particularly attractive addition for some reason is baling twine left on the ground by those feeding hay to livestock. This is quite often fatal to adults and nestlings alike, as many as 5 to 10 % total and a major mortality factor. They become entangled in the polypropylene rope, a persistent problem as it does not break down, and even just one strand can cause a deformity as they grow as chicks or are hung up and die in the nest or elsewhere. Dr. Erick Greene at the University of Montana found one nest that contained over 4000 meters of the stuff, 13,000 feet plus!

Perhaps as much as 75% of all Osprey nests near human habitation have this problem. Easily remedied - pick up the colorful (or black, too) twine and dispose of it properly out of site from these raptors. Today's photo is a Bitterroot pair just back from migration, hunkering down in a snow squall with the dangerous material blowing in the wind. Birds at this nest have been successful parents for many years, and we only hope they continue without the threat of baling twine. Pick it up, please!

## Photos By Keith

Keith Fialcowitz got this shot to the left of Sib's tail as she flew right over his head. Check out the shadows in the snow - very artistic and tells the tale (sorry.) He got these while laying in the snow with a wide angle lens. Keith took the photographs for Montanan Magazine, many covers for National Geographic Explorer, and the greatest animal lover I have ever met. And what an eye.

Sibley the Peregrine flies nearly every day, starting in late August until mid March, then she takes a break to molt over the summer. And probably lay eggs. Including tours, she did 90 programs last year, so what a dual life she has, and we love talking about Peregrine recovery in North America, and Montana.



### The Write Question, MTPR

You can visit "The Write Question" Blogspot and hear the interview, 29 minutes of chatting about the Bald Eagle book with host Cherie Newman on Montana Public Radio. She used her magic "editing wand" to pare the show down from over an hour of interviewing and what a fine job! The show airs here, Yellowstone and Spokane Public Radio and now, the four corners region of Colorado. Check out the myriad of authors and listen "live" on Thursdays at 7:30 pm, KUFM in Missoula.



We are very sad to lose our dear friend, Gwen Wood, who passed on March 10th at age 88. The Wood's have been our favorite pals since the start, with sponsorship even before we had our non-profit. She and Bob were our favorite Raptor Backers, along with daughters Kristen and Vicki, a wonderful family.

One of the greatest memories I have is of her 80th birthday celebration at the Raptor Ranch. Gwen was given my print of a loon, bold black and white, and with her near blindness, she recognized it right away. "We have those in Minnesota!" Then she looked on the back and printed in equally bold black letters: "Happy Birthday, Gwen!" A few of us had tears. Our condolences to family and friends.

# Our Back Yard, Continued

Sometimes I wonder why I ever leave the property to look for birds with so much action going on here. The biggest attraction (= distraction) is the Bald Eagle nest across the river. You absolutely can't walk through the living room without checking it through the spotting scope by the window (unless it's nighttime and dark.) I head down there every evening with the dogs and the Nikon D800 if the light is nice, and sometimes even when it's not. The young are starting to show their heads and the female can leave them for longer periods. Once she came out of the tree and smacked one of a pair of Canada Geese flying by, knocking it to the water for fun, I guess. Didn't get a good shot of that, oh well, but cracked me up.

Then there is the adult male Goshawk that flies through the yard now and then, and if he times it right, when the pigeons are out cruising around. I got a bunch of shots of him plucking an unfortunate member of our flock, and even him laying down over the prey absolutely still, when an eagle (that kleptoparasite) flew overhead. Crouching Tiger.

Kate Davis photos ©



## Thanks Ryan Gibbs and NorthWestern Energy!



Ryan Gibbs has been a great friend for years since we met skiing at SnowBowl. He's the one that installed an Osprey platform at John and Marna Abbott's, Abbott's Glass on Mullan Road ten years ago, plus we put up some kestrel nest boxes. Now has been the most ambitious project - retrofitting our power poles at Raptors of the Rockies to make them safe for birds - all with the blessings (and help) of NorthWestern Energy and their big boom truck. He changed the wires, added polymer bushing covers, and even a new lightning arrester, all in a hot spot on top of the transformer with 7200 volts.

For those millions that followed the Riverside Osprey Web Cam this spring, remember that the young birds all fledged to a power pole on the Clark Fork River? NWEnergy retrofitted that spot the very next day. So we thank Ryan for his expert work in the past and here in the yard this week, and (on the lower right) his photo in the new Bald Eagle book of the deer fawn he pulled off the power lines in East Missoula. The "Flying Deer" story that made it around the world on the internet in a day.



Another bookmark, and this one is Sibley hovering over a game bird she had knocked into a sagebrush. Mookie that dog was retrieving it so had plenty of time for these shots. My friend James thoughtfully intervened to wedge the bird out of Mookie's mouth, and a lesson learned by all.

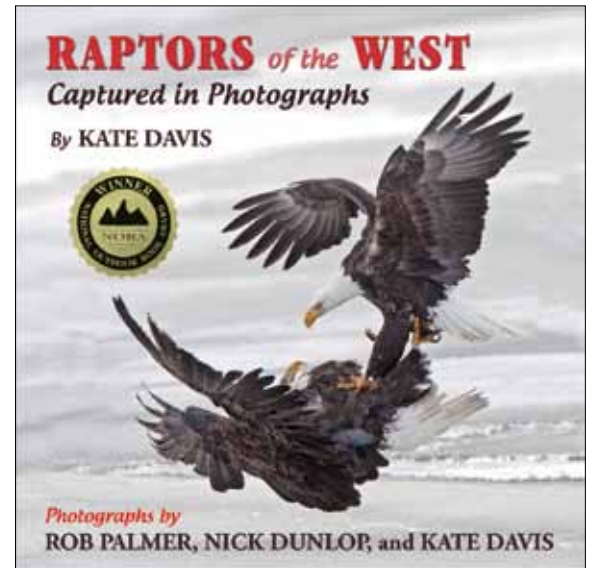


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- Enclosure Maintenance
- Daily Care, 365 days a year
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- Travel
- Web Site, Blog Page
- Telephone, Postage
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A portion of all book proceeds goes back to help fund our program!

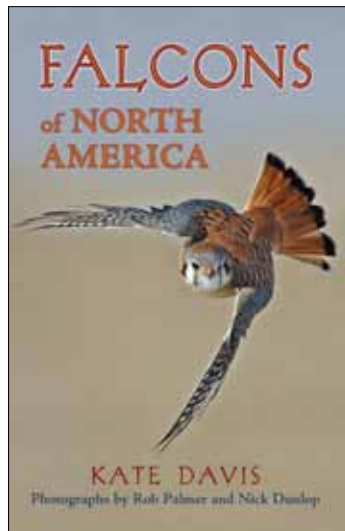


**WINNER! National Outdoor Book Award**  
**WINNER! Montana Book of the Year Award**

Pages: 250    Size: 10 x 9 5/8    Price: \$30/\$35 with shipping  
 Species: 45    Photographs: 430 in 6 habitats

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- |                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
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| Swainson's Hawk      | Evita ~ \$ 200   |
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| Harris's Hawk        | Chesty ~ \$ 150  |
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| American Kestrel     | JayDub ~ \$ 75   |
| Peregrine Falcon     | Sibley ~ \$ 400  |
| Gyr/Peregrine hybrid | Ansel ~ \$ 250   |
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| N. Saw-whet Owl      | Owen ~ \$ 50     |
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

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## Thank you Raptor Backers!

*sponsors since our last newsletter*

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