

**Raptors of the Rockies**  
 P.O. BOX 250, FLORENCE, MT 59833  
 Our 29th Year of Education

# Raptor Round-Up

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 Photography and Book web site

NUMBER 51, AUG 2016

## Bald Eagle and Kestrel: *Real!*



Kate Davis photos ©

This photo went “viral” as they say after a few posts on Facebook, the first by me and then on the HawkWatch International site, posted by pal Joseph Dane. So far it has about 3000 “likes” and 1000 “shares” plus several comments that it must be fake. Nope, this is right out of the camera, just cropped and lightened a bit and

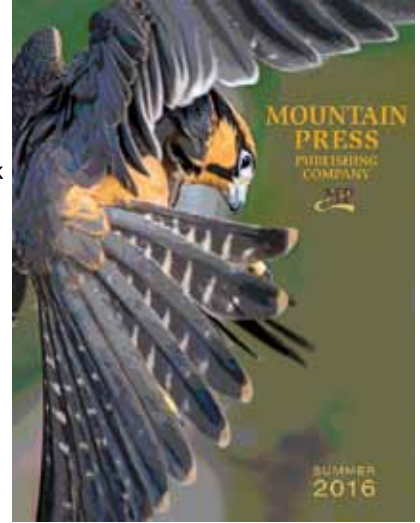
quite the story. I’ve been photographing a Bald Eagle nest and their neighbors every night on the Bitterroot River by my house. This was their fifth year, and I predicted these two chicks were going to fledge (leave the nest) on July 9th.

They were a few days earlier than that, both exiting about 2 p.m. When I went down to the beach two hours later, the eagles were in a nearby snag getting attacked by a pair of kestrels. The male falcon was bouncing off the eagle’s back and she fled, to have the female falcon take a ride on her head...twice! This second photo captured it and viewers were worried about the eagle’s eyes. They are fine, and had many comparisons to Kate Winslet and Leo DiCaprio before the famous boat sinks, film buffs.

The sister eagles hung around the nest tree begging for a month, plus perched on top of our eagle building, dispersing soon. I have no idea where they go, but lots to scavenge out there.



Sonora our Aplomado Falcon graces the cover of the Mountain Press summer catalog, a little artsy shot from when she was younger and oranger. She’s a rock star with 27 programs last year and 17 so far this year, including a modeling gig at the Missoula Art Museum. Here she is with 8 year old Lucy Millar and her beautiful painting. She’s also the star of an MCAT video. Sonora was donated by The Peregrine Fund in 2013, very kind of them.



I lucked out with this Osprey plunge as well, but he didn’t score a fish this time.

## 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 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.

## One Thousand Six Hundred

My 1600th educational program was in June, here at the Raptor Ranch. Guests were the Missoula Community Access Television (MCAT) Young Filmmakers Workshop with Ron Scholl, a camp we first started in 1999 with the International Wildlife Film Festival. A short made by two girls on the Great Horned Owls won a bunch of awards, my favorite line (in a BBC accent) "they eat everything...Raw!" There's Sonora the Aplomado on the bookshelf in the background, the filmmakers watching my video of the baby falcon on the computer. They made a dandy short with Sonora singing "Shake, Senora," Calypso style by Harry Belafonte. Very sweet, and original!



With great sorrow we report that our Miles the Great Horned Owl died in April, program favorite in hundreds and hundreds of appearances, his last one on Montana Public Radio. He spent 18 years with us after hitting a power line and was missing feathers as a result. Who knows his real age as he was an adult when he joined us, and his time as an educator will be cherished. Miles (Davis) lived with Jillian the female Great Horned and he'd been hooting up a storm and eating his mice, but was often laying down and I suspected that old age was taking its toll. Miles always lead into a little discussion jazz music and finished the program with everyone making their own owl music by hooting in unison. This lower photo was taken (with film) in 1999 at the old Raptor Ranch in Clinton. He even had eye surgery 14 years ago, his life spared by doctors Jim Randall and Scott Bovard.



Miles had been a staple for our Birds And Art Workshops with students making paper mache raptors to take home. I always tell the kids that I will be over to their house in five or ten years to make sure they still have their sculptures in their bedrooms. I was just at a convenience store in Missoula and a tall young man leaned over the counter from the cash register and asked, "You're Kate, right? I have to tell you that my mother threw my owl away when I went to college, sorry." It was a Miles paper mache sculpture, all is forgiven, promise. We sure miss our superstar owl, and quiet around here at night. Miles did more to benefit the natural world than he could ever know.



LEFT: Sibley chowing down on a quail in the living room, cameras cranking. ABOVE: Everyone pointing at the eagle nest except Ron in the back. Ron remarked that at this rate I'll hit the 2000th program mark around 2023 or 2024, for an MCAT Camp, no doubt!

# Birds and Art at the Museum



These were the best camp kids yet, lots of siblings and best friends starting their summer vacation. We had two days of sketching live birds, then broke out paper mache then paints, feathers and glue and googie eyes. Bev Glueckert and I love this class and we actually started at the university. One year they accidentally scheduled our class in a lecture hall so all construction happened in the Botany Building parking lot!



Above: Our first Boreal Owl and Aplomado Falcon sculptures, twins celebrating their 8th birthday, and sisters with a life-size Bald Eagle. Plus some owls, hawks, an Ospreys, and happy campers.

## Ospreys Are Awesome, Too



Kate Davis photos ©

Last newsletter I was touting the Peregrine as awesome - what an overused word but sure descriptive. I also love watching Ospreys, the Fish Hawks, equally descriptive as that is all they eat - 99% live fish. This might be a problem during high river runoff in the spring with murky water, and I've seen them flying up to clear mountain lakes to hunt. Bald Eagles on the other hand eat anything from squirrels to roadkill and afterbirth, and fish. So the male Osprey is often intercepted by an eagle on the way back to the nest, at a disadvantage in flight as he has a heavy load. He may be forced to drop his fish, theft by the Bald Eagle. This time of year I always watch the Ospreys swooping on perched eagles screaming in terror. It seems like they can't pass up a pot shot, though I have never seen contact. My non-scientific anthropocentric theory is that they are getting their revenge for the spring. Eagles still chase Ospreys carrying food, but perched they are sitting ducks, pardon the pun. Always root for the Osprey!

We will say farewell to the Fish Hawk soon, the adults migrating weeks before the young, most everyone gone by mid-October. Researchers at the MPG Ranch tell us they go to Texas, Mexico and some to Central America. Another reason to root for the Osprey. Bald Eagles must breathe a collective sigh of relief that they are safe from random attacks - until next spring.

TOP: A largemouth bass, now where did that come from? Perhaps the river but maybe a pond stocked with these non-natives somewhere nearby.

ABOVE: My bro and fellow photographer Nick Dunlop once told me that the secret to a good photo is a combination of luck, skill and planning. Plus a few thousand hours with cooperative and photogenic subjects...in the backyard.



## ❖ Upcoming Public Raptor Programs:

**Friday, Sept. 2 Fact and Fiction Book Store:** Check out "Birds Are People, Too" and get an autographed copy, a First Friday event, downtown Missoula at Fact and Fiction, 220 North Higgins. 5:30 pm. Sonora will be joining us, plus Barbara is hosting a caption-that-photo contest, the eagle/kestrel shot and pair of hummingbirds fighting one too. Big display at the store, and win valuable prizes!

**Thursday, Sept. 15 Montana Tech in Butte:** Raptors program at 4:00-5:00 pm, free and open to the public. PowerPoint, falcon and owl... and books!

**Friday, Sept. 23 Montana Book Festival:** Join us at Shakespeare & Co. at 2 pm for a PowerPoint entitled "Birds Are People, Too" and meet Sonora the Aplomado Falcon. Missoula's Hip Strip at 103 S. 3rd Street W.

TUESDAY, APRIL 26, 2016

## Observation Partner

My mother (in her early 80's) has become quite the Peregrine observer this season, and yesterday spotted one before I did. We witnessed a pigeon delivery to the female and I think have nailed the nest location for one pair up the Blackfoot. It's an old site from 12 or so years ago, I swear. We'll try another spot tomorrow and then I'll be sticking mailing labels and stamps on 200 Raptor Round-Up Newsletters. Filling out my 990 income tax forms today...yawn. You have to mix the merriment with the mundane!



MONDAY, JUNE 13, 2016

## What's Wrong With This Picture?

When Jack Kirkley and I drove by this Osprey platform near Wisdom in the Big Hole Valley we wondered if the Bald Eagle was just perching there or was eating baby Ospreys. On the way back I investigated and nope, she has a chick and what a surprise! I've never seen a Bald Eagle nesting on one of these, a strange sight in the sagebrush.



SATURDAY, MAY 21, 2016

## ROTR Penguin

Check out the Future Leaders of the Free World, Girl Scout Troop #3609 of Stevensville with Mookie. They donated part of their cookie sales to ROTR, wonderful kids. Parents wanted a group shot right away and I said to wait and take it with the penguin. Several girls shrieked in delight and searched around for a bird building coated in ice cycles. I hope they weren't too disappointed that the penguin was made of steel and not the real living thing.



TUESDAY, JUNE 28, 2016

## Nice Clouds at Dark

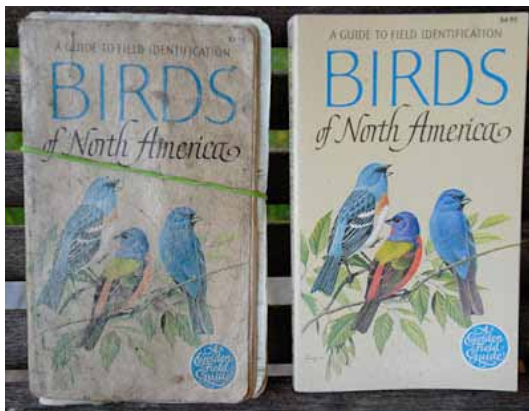
I couldn't resist letting the pigeons out one last time. A few weeks ago a bunch of 2nd graders were here and their favorite part was letting the pigeons fly around. The birds go back in a one-way door after a while then time to let them go again, three times! I know they went home and told their parents, "We went to this lady's house and she had a bunch of white pigeons!" and forget to mention the eagles and owls and others...



TUESDAY, MAY 10, 2016

## Golden Field Guide

Who else started with one of these? I just bought a new copy at The Book Exchange in Missoula for \$2.50 and brought my old-rubberband-bound-falling-apart copy I got when in 5th grade to show those folks. "What a well-loved book," they decided. I always stuffed that copy in the back of my pants with my 8 x 35 Bushnell binoculars in the front of my shirt, thanks Mom and Dad. A bit more sophisticated now, but still one of my favorites, especially nostalgic. A great gift for the kids, then get the Sibley Guide to Birds after that, okay?



SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 2016

## Happy 100th Birthday!

Happy Birthday to John Craighead, 100 years young today! He and twin brother Frank are the founders of American falconry, radio telemetry, and field research with ground-breaking books like *Hawks, Owls, and Wildlife* from 1956. They also documented their 1940-41 "Life With an Indian Prince" in a fascinating book and film. I found this photo from 2005 and

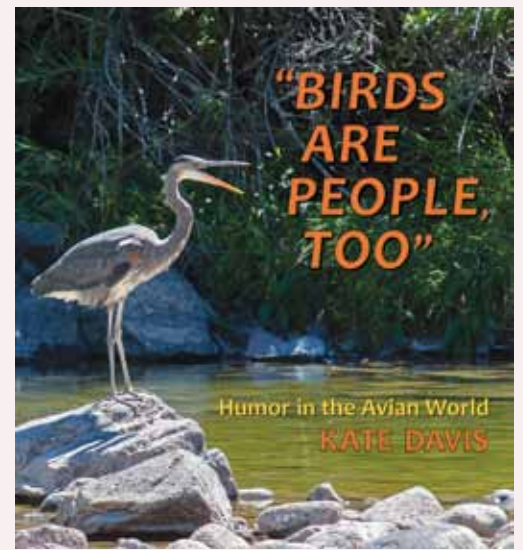
wrote about this hawking experience in the intro to my book *Falcons of North America*. While flying Sibley in the Bitterroot, I wrote: "what a huge honor to have our guru, mentor, and hero present." Absolutely!



# Summer Hummers



Black-chinned and Rufous Hummingbirds duke it out in the yard.



"Kate Davis knows birds, and it's a riot to see that someone as knowledgeable and talented as Kate can't help but anthropomorphize the behaviors of these beautiful and wondrous creatures.

"This book is a reminder of the beauty of the world, and that we have a kinship with all living things. Our ability to laugh at our condition is what makes us, and our avian friends, special. And hilarious."

—BILL HARLEY, Grammy Award-winning storyteller, singer, author

*Snag a copy today!*



For some reason this Red-winged Blackbird was especially ornery in June and even dive-bombed this eagle while she was perched. Check out the fish that she is carrying - examining other photos it looks like a brown trout that's been dead for a while. She flew off the nest tree in a big hurry and came back right away with this, probably floating by. A treat for the youngsters. This photo will appear in the 2017 Peregrine Fund Calendar, a real honor.



Not that wise, but pretty darn smart.

# Hey! That's not a Raptor!



Spotted Sandpiper, Common Merganser and Belted Kingfisher, all on the beach. I have hundreds of photos of each species taken when nothing eagle was going on, especially during incubation.



# Big Hole Adventure with Jack Kirkley

Jack Kirkley photo ©



Here I am sitting on a log in a camo suit, covered in camo cloth with just the end of the 500 mm lens poking out. Invisible, unless the hawk detects motion. That hawk stared at the new "log" nearly the whole time, and I started feeling a bit claustrophobic. Then the jig was up. Motion! My evenings at the river seem like luxury now - to be able to stand out in the open with the tripod and camera, whistling David Bowie songs and talking to the dogs, spitting sunflower seeds. I count my lucky stars.

My long-time buddy Dr. Jack Kirkley of Dillon invited me to try to photograph some birds in June in the Big Hole Valley, my annual trek. This time his spin was to cover me in camouflage cloth near a Northern Goshawk nest, sort of like a tiny blind. Jack installed me in position and noisily walked back to the car. Birds can't count, so we would trick the bird and I could photograph to my heart's content hidden from view. He wrote in an e-mail, "The point would be to totally minimize your movements beneath that camo cloth, so you don't get "busted" by that bird."

With three chicks in the nest 50 yards away, the female returned in no time at all. This worked for about a half hour then I slowly changed a setting on my camera and BUSTED. The cacking and flying right at me began! So I emerged from the camo cocoon and shot the perched bird for another hour. She could not care less that I was out in the open now, what a gorgeous bird.

We then visited a Great Gray Owl nest a short drive away to find the mother standing and staring but the young nowhere to be seen. They had used an old goshawk nest for several years and their tree was now leaning badly. We hoped the young had fledged safely and were just quiet and not begging, out there somewhere. What an adventure and thanks, Jack, The Goshawk (and Anything Raptor)



Kate Davis photos ©



## Cards Courtesy Pyramid Printing



I have been printing greeting cards all along on the little Epson C88, cutting and folding and a ton of work. I just handed the job over to our friends at Pyramid in Missoula and what a fine product. Right now we have 33 images, posted on our site by Webmaster Extraordinaire Steve Palmer, available in packages of 5 with envelopes, a selection at The Good Food Store, plus the whole collection is always at Rockin Rudys. As I come up with more photos (I hope to, anyway) we will update. I love having these cards out there and know that some people still send notes in the mail, or have them up on the refrigerator. The all-time best seller is that first shot of the four Golden Retrievers in the river. A fifth dog was standing to the right but the stick was too short, no kidding.



Girls Using Their Strengths (GUTS!) from the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association - bet you always wondered about that acronym) and Watershed Education Network (WEN) spent the day at the ranch and river. We were all studying aquatic life, invasive species and raptors. I know I learned a bunch from WEN instructors Debbie Fassnacht and Heidi Sedivy and the dogs were spoiled rotten with hugs. Then back to the beach for photos of six kestrels and some eagles before dark. Tough job but somebody has to do it.

# Our Raptors: and Sponsorship Appreciated!



Max the Golden Eagle



iPod the Northern Pygmy-Owl



Evita the Swainson's Hawk



Owen the Northern Saw-whet Owl

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



Sonora the Aplomado Falcon



Sonny the Bald Eagle



Jillian the Great Horned Owl



Otto the Rough-legged Hawk



Ansel the Gyrfalcon/Peregrine



Sibley the Peregrine Falcon



Alisa the Red-tailed Hawk



Nigel the Golden Eagle



Ella and Wes the American Kestrels



Faithful Companions Mookie and Peanut



Sibley the Peregrine stoop



Trees and bushes are growing like crazy, the buildings hardly recognizable since construction in 2001! I am very proud of these facilities, our birds with safe enclosures and places to get in and out of the elements, lots of stimulus in natural surroundings and many with roommates they like.

Your generosity helps us with EVERYTHING!  
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 Travel  
 3 Newsletters a year

YES, I want to sponsor the Raptors of the Rockies with this tax-deductible contribution,

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Contribution amount or Adopted Raptor \_\_\_\_\_

## Thank you Raptor Backers!

*sponsors since our last newsletter*

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Special thanks Marina Richie  
for your years of board  
membership and advice - Best  
wishes in Oregon!



Kate Davis photos ©

*Young Mule Deer at Wildhorse Island-  
Thanks Barry Gordon.*



*Hauling Grass*

# Raptors of the Rockies

P.O. Box 250, Florence, MT 59833

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## Raptors of the Rockies

Educational Programs since 1988

