

Raptors of the Rockies
P.O. BOX 250, FLORENCE, MT 59833

Educational Programs since 1988

Raptor Round-Up

www.raptorsoftherockies.org
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Photography and book web site

NUMBER 41, AUGUST 2012

My favorite photo of the summer:

Peregrine Milestone

Montana passes the 100 nests mark



Montana Peregrine Institute's director Jay Sumner reported on July 26th with an exclamation point, "We made it: 100 active Peregrine territories in Montana this year. 184 young and still counting!" This has always been a magical number, and I can remember saying ten years ago, "Some day I bet we have one hundred." Prior to 1984, zero in the state and five years ago, just 68 nests. Of course there are lots more falcons in remote country, but I must say, Jay conducts the most thorough survey humanly possible. He looked at over 200 cliffs himself, spending 30 hours total at one particularly vexing nest in the Flathead and never did get both adults, bummer.

Peregrines tend to nest on cliffs over waterways, and those are usually bordered by roads, so easy access to most. Plus with Google Earth, we can pick likely spots from a chair in the office. I must say that our Bitterroot Valley now re-takes the record, inching past the Bighorn and Clark Fork drainages, with 14 Peregrine Falcon nests. Amazing for a place that had no records of Peregrines pre-DDT era. But they had to be here, with tall cliffs at every drainage and abundant songbirds, shorebirds and ducks to hunt. Paradise for a Peregrine.

This photo is from One Horse Creek across the road, a young female Peregrine checking me out, undoubtable the first human she had ever seen. I was honored. The table show the figures at the first week of August, some data still coming in:

MPI Surveys 2012

number of active territories	108
number of fledged young	203 (!)
number of volunteers in Peregrine Watch	36
number of miles driven by Jay	30,000 plus



photos by Kate Davis ©

While photographing a pair of kestrels at Eagle Valley Ranch, Idaho, this Red-tailed Hawk flew in with a snake. It was escorted from the breeding grounds by the female falcon. What a big baby...

Owen the Owl

We are thankful to have our newest resident, a handsome Northern Saw-whet. He came from Wildlife Return in Whitefish in June. Struck by a car two years earlier, he arrived with the name Owen from the folks that recovered him on the roadway, and a huge coincidence as that is the name we would have chosen - that of the young son of Dale and Jennifer Manning on our Board of Directors, Owen. Our last Saw-whet Owl was named Maya, after the daughter of Kathy and John Heffernan also on the board. Poor Maya the owl died this winter after just a short time in programs, hypothermia setting in after a fall in her enclosure. We hope that Owen will be with us for a while, splitting the appearances with his next-door neighbor iPod, the Northern Pygmy-owl. Buster our favorite Saw-whet lived to be 12, close to the record.



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.

Another Milestone



I just sold my 400th copy of *Raptors of the West*, and must admit that every penny has gone back into camera gear. Mountain Press Publishing has a second printing and stickers for winning the National Outdoor Book Award are already installed. Most of my sales have been right out of the back of the Subaru, and I think we need another one of those very soon. Anyone with a one to sell, a 2010 or later, let me know. Must be green. Or blue. Guess I had better sell some more books - our 7th Subaru wagon. Birds fit perfectly!

Golden Eagle Goes

Back in April I was out feeding the birds when a pick-up truck pulled up with a guy looking for The Bird Lady. That was how I met Scott Leibenguth and a three-year-old Golden Eagle he found on a remote dirt road. The giant female was totally paralyzed, a mystery injury with no traffic and the closest power line over 20 miles away. Much later we figured she must have gotten in an aerial battle with another eagle and crashed to the ground. Very little hope at first but miracles do happen, and three weeks later she was standing and chowing down on squirrels. In that time her flight muscles had atrophied, and she developed an infected toe. That was when our friends at the Montana Raptor Conservation Center in Bozeman took over (heroes!), treatment for that foot and exercise in their huge flight building. So August 3rd Scott opened the kennel door, over three months since he handed her over, and about the best release I have ever seen. I don't know who was happier, Scott or the eagle, and she got up, headed south and didn't look back.



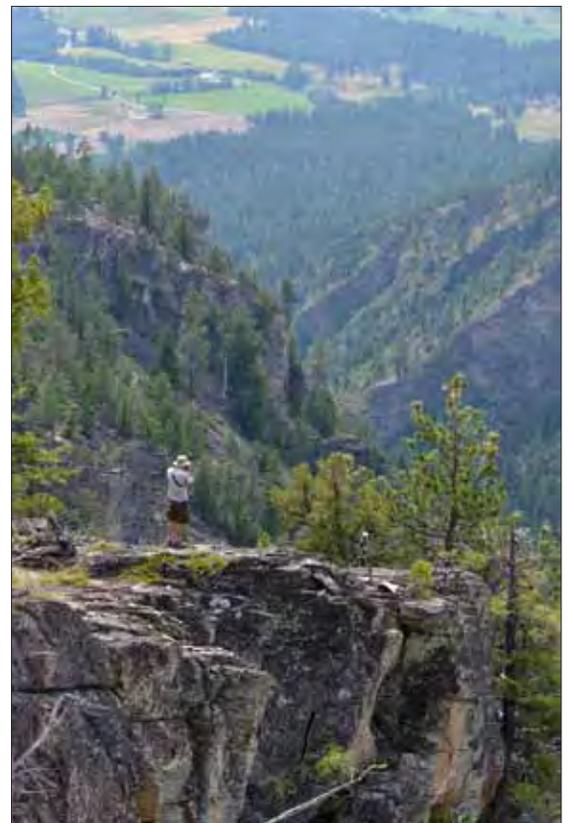
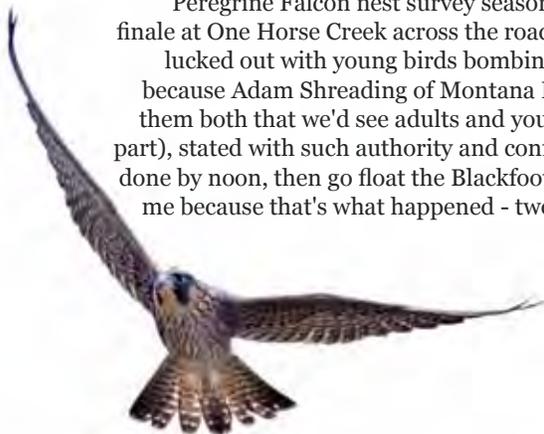
Jay Sumner captured the action with his photo of Scott and the star eagle.



One Horse Creek Peregrines

Peregrine Falcon nest survey season has wound down, and always a grand finale at One Horse Creek across the road. Every year, Mac Donofrio and I have lucked out with young birds bombing around and this year was even better because Adam Shreading of Montana Peregrine Institute joined us. I assured them both that we'd see adults and young right away (wishful thinking on my part), stated with such authority and confidence that they believed me. "Oh yea, done by noon, then go float the Blackfoot River..." The falcons must have heard me because that's what happened - two young chasing their mother, photo of

Mac and spotting scope on the cliff. That's our friend Bob Tabke's ranch below, exercise grounds for our Peregrine, Sibley, and how we found out wild birds were nesting here in the first place. They chased her or young birds would come in and beg, feed me!



Battle Above the Bitterroot

We have enjoyed several raft floats from Stevensville to our house in Florence and instead of the fly rod, I have opted for the D700 Nikon and 80 to 400 mm lens. Perhaps a good choice as these two raptors were squabbling overhead one afternoon, Bald Eagle and Osprey. A very vocal and potentially dangerous display of might. We were also treated to more than 20 Lewis's Woodpeckers catching insects in the air, and found two of their nests facing the river.



Kate Davis photos ©



Arch Enemies, these two raptors hunt fish, but Ospreys exclusively eat nothing but. Bald Eagles have a more catholic diet, consuming just about anything they can get their talons on, including theft from the Fish Hawk. Although no fish was involved and no blood was spilled here, the Osprey seemed in attack mode, as we have seen so many times at the nest behind the house. We always side with Ospreys.

The Coyote Choir Rules!

We enjoyed a very musical spring, joining Amy Martin and the Coyote Choir for gigs in schools all over town. Singer/Songwriter/Rock Star Amy wrote five songs about raptors that the group of 22 youngsters performed in assemblies, on Montana Public Radio, and on the stage at MCT. I found myself singing them in my head all day (*Then snap the prey right out of the sky...*). We even had four assemblies in one day, thousands of students enjoying the interactive presentations, and then a party at my house the next morning. I got my request of "I Dig My Feathers" performed on the deck, which is now on our YouTube page, complete with Mookie the dog licking the mike.

Their finale was the Spring Rumpus at a packed house at the Missoula Community Theater, and I joined them briefly on stage with Sibley to say a few words. I pointed out that the falcon was nine years old, average Coyote Choir age, just that Sib was flying free at 45 days of age. The kids have many more years before it will happen to them. This was the greatest experience ever in our Raptor programs, and thanks Amy and the Coyotes! Here they are on MT Public Radio's Pea Green Boat with four songs heard 'round the world.

The best thrill of it all-I am now an honorary Coyote Choir Member and have the certificate to prove it.



Chorus to "I Dig My Feathers"
 I guess a pelt serves you well in all kinds of weather
 And having a skin seems to be in -- all the kids wear 'em these days
 Sportin' a hide is alright if you like to wear leather
 But me -- I really dig my feathers



Back Yard Nest 2012

The eagle nest was constructed last year but no *productivity* (science for *babies*) but this year, three. We watched this nest from a spotting scope set up in the living room, with a visit in the evenings, when the light was great, with the dogs and a camera. A few shots of the parents made it to the new Bald Eagle book, which I am proofing now - out January 2013. These three fledged young have been fearless around here, perching on the fence, on the eagle building, and on Chesty's phone pole in the driveway.

TUESDAY, APRIL 24, 2012

Squirrels As Friends...and Food

In two days of photographing the Bald Eagle nest on the Clark Fork, I see a pattern developing. Squirrels! First, the adult Eastern Fox Squirrel that raised young in the nest last year was back, the female eagle alert that some mammal was climbing about below.



Then I got this shot days later of the raptor babies, fox squirrel tail in the nest, and I doubt it was sleeping, just a meal. Everyone wonders how prey could live right with it's predator species, but it happens all the time. Those eagles would have a hard time catching squirrels in the nest right next to them, but somehow they are able to grab them across the valley.

SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 2012

Big Sky Awards!

Mom and I put some miles on the Subaru starting Thursday, and drove to Big Sky to accept the Montana Book Award for *Raptors of the West* at the Huntley Lodge. What



a surprise, as the award was a framed poster from a favorite movie of mine, *Rancho Deluxe*, signed by its author Tom McGuane. He wrote, "With admiration for all you do for our hawks," and a brilliant gift! Barbara Theroux of Fact and Fiction Books pondered what art to give an artist and our friend Anne Iverson at Mountain Press suggested anything *Rancho Deluxe*. It hangs proudly in my living room, to treasure forever.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20, 2012

MCAT Filmmakers Return!

Ron Scholl and I started doing a class for young film directors 13 years ago (even though I always think it's more like 20) and today, the kids and instructors showed up for a big day at the Raptor Ranch.



The week-long class with Missoula Community Access Television, or MCAT, started with a tour and lessons in wildlife film ethics. The three films made by the kids were the usual interview/overview, superhero-something-or-other, and a new slant by three girls. They created a parody of something called *The Hardassisons* or maybe it was *Kardashians* with mean, gossiping, yet very attractive owls engaged in backstabbing and vapid banter. Thanks to the group for re-installing our bridge across the slough in the back, and here, filming Chesty flying all over the place.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6, 2012

Year Six at PBGR

A highlight of the year in programs has been a visit to the Rocky Mountain Front, Pine Butte Guest Ranch, and two days with David Sibley. A guest of the Nature Conservancy, David conducts a week-long birders workshop, and this year co-hosted with fellow artist Keith Hansen of CA. I did my Powerpoint which included the Bald Eagle book and new kestrel project, then presented *JayDub the American Kestrel*, Alisa the Red-tail and finished up with Jillian the Great Horned Owl. Here, Keith on the left and David on the right perform their magic in pencil and acrylic paint, fingers and brushes for Mr. Sibley. The



next day was spent at Freezeout Lake and we kept seeing an SUV with refuge license plates and a "Birdwatcher" sticker. They no doubt had their Sibley field guides in their laps, and if they only knew who was in that white van - the finest birder in North America!

MONDAY,
MAY 14, 2012

Team Effort in Corvallis

Anyone who lives in Corvallis or attends the Elementary School (or watches



KECI News) is familiar with the Great Horned Owl family in the playground. A flimsy crow's nest from last year was taken over by the owls, two nestlings often peering down at the swing set full of kids. Last week, one adventurous baby ended up on the ground and cruised over to a neighbor's, the corner of the playground fenced off in crime scene tape while the principal Mrs. Stranahan called me for advice. I showed up just as Will Schrock of Schrock Construction was inspecting the roof of the school with an extension ladder, and our Hero of the Day. I made it up about four steps with the nestling tucked under one arm and then my knees started shaking. Afraid of heights? I guess so, but not Will who installed it 30 feet up, stepping across a big gap to place the baby in the crotch of the tree. All over in 20 minutes, and she was back with her sibling the next morning, thank goodness. We have had several calls about young owls on the ground, so just get them up in a tree and they'll figure it out from there.

I had a travelling photography show that started at the University, then The Artists's Shop downtown, and finished at The River's Mist in Stevensville. It was getting bigger, and a few times I took a shot, printed and framed it and installed the next day. The photo of the Bald Eagle was taken on the way back from the Big Sky Awards right at the edge of Yellowstone Park. Mom and I passed this guy standing near the road and I kept hitting the brakes until Mom said, "Turn around!" You should always listen to your mother.

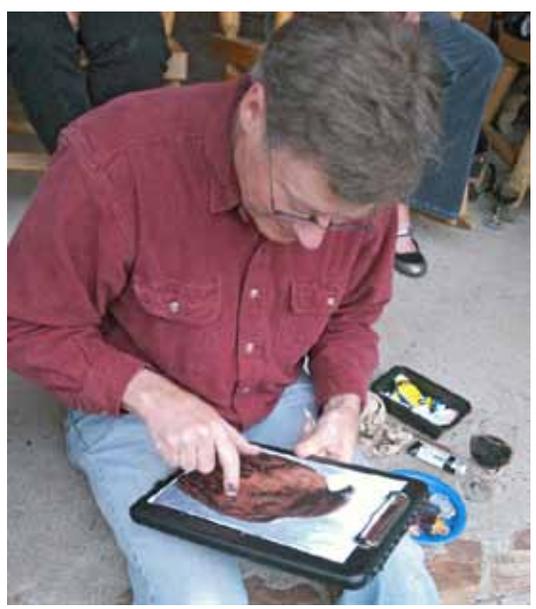


Birds And Art at MAM



Kate Davis photos ©

Black-chinned Hummingbird grooms a toe. (Not a raptor)



David Sibley's acrylic painting of Alisa the Red-tail was auctioned off as a fundraiser for Raptors of the Rockies on his web site, thank you! It currently hangs in Davis, California where they listen to the real Alisa Clancy on KCSM Jazz Radio from San Mateo! Really.

Just about the best ever week for Birds at the Missoula Art Museum, and some photos from the Thursday- finished paper mache raptors. A Bald Eagle, Saw-whet Owl, Peregrine, then Barn Owl and Red-tail, Kestrel and first ever Striped Owl. And kids, I was just kidding when I said that glue was made from horses...just a joke. A nod to the David Sibley Field Guide, which aided the artists in avian accuracy. That's a mouthful! See you next year, first week after school is out in June, our ump-teenth year of fun.

Scenic Kestrel Nest

This year's project/obsession was photographing a beautiful American Kestrel nest just a ten minute drive from the house. I was out looking at a cliff that might some day work for Peregrines, when I spotted another pair of falcons in a cottonwood tree, courtship behavior galore. I got permission to hop the fence and was delighted to find them repeatedly checking out a cavity in an ancient cottonwood snag in a pasture. I calculated the 30 day incubation, added a week, then staked out my spot to photograph prey deliveries, great light in the morning on the nest, in the evening on the cottonwood tree which held their favorite perches.

I was amazed to see the adults fly out and return with a vole in a minute, over and over again- great providers - and insects from grasshoppers and crickets to a dragonfly caught in the air right by the nest. I was there for hours each morning at fledging time, trying to capture a bird hopping out of the hole. I had been standing and peering through the camera viewfinder for an hour and just reached down to pet the dog, only to look back see the male had popped out without a photo, oh well. He crashed into a cottonwood tree, so I got his first flight anyway.

The young all decorated the tree nearby like Christmas ornaments and I am swearing by my count of six. A clutch of five is fairly common, but six is remarkable. That cavity must be huge inside and I wonder if that dictates brood size? Sounds like a master's thesis to me. The eagles behind the house started fledging the same day so exciting times for a while.



TOP, TOP: The nest snag and cottonwood.
 TOP & TOP RIGHT: Courtship behavior in late April and early May.
 LOWER RIGHT: Three of the six fledglings
 LEFT: Female with a food delivery, items ranging from voles to dragonflies.

Kate Davis photos ©

Ohrmann's Latest

My art mentor, Bill Ohrmann built a new metal sculpture, this giant Kodiak Bear. Theoretically, Bill at age 93 should be kicking back, playing bridge, watching NASCAR on TV...but no, an eleven foot sculpture and cover story in the Missoulian in July. He installed his signature - a metal red-painted heart inside. Bill tacks all of the hundreds of pieces to the frame, which is like a skeleton, and son John welds each one in place; quite the team. Check it out for yourself along with the myriad of other sculptures, woodcarvings, and paintings ("something to offend everyone") I was so inspired I started a sculpture of my own, half that size though. And a bird, surprise, surprise, done in a few weeks. An 18 gauge steel Gyrfalcon.



John Ohrmann photo ©



TOP: After months of working on the sculpture in a horizontal position, he finally stands in the doorway of the shop. Amazing! The shiny is stainless steel, darker is 16 gauge hot-rolled and each comes in 8' x 4' sheets. Just cut it into pieces that look like a Kodiak Bear.
 LEFT: John tack welds the head into place for a story for the Missoulian. Front Page: Behemoth Bear



Always trying to think of ways to help out our bird community, we decided to start manufacturing Bald Eagle nest boxes, to be ready for the 2013 breeding season. With long lives and pair bonds, "your" eagles may return year after year, with the young fledging in early July. We'll include instructions on placement and even some wood shaving to put inside. Order now, from your friends at Raptors of the Rockies.

Ohrmann Museum "Usually Open" three miles up Scenic Highway 1 from Drummond. Look for the 2 giant bears, a rhino, & woolly mammoth

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Kate Davis photo ©

Ansel the Gyr/Peregrine had a great program at the Missoula Library

Teaching Team:

Golden Eagles	Max ~ \$ 1000
	Nigel ~ \$ 500
Bald Eagle	Sonny ~ \$300
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
Northern Saw-whet Owl	Owen ~ \$ 50 <i>NEW!</i>
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 receipt, plus be listed on our web site and next newsletter. Thanks adoptive parents for your support!

WINNER! National Outdoor Book Award
 WINNER! Montana Book Award 2011

Raptors of the West: Captured in Photographs

P.O. Box 250 Florence, MT 59833
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YES, I want to sponsor the Raptors of the Rockies with this tax-deductible contribution:

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Thank you Raptor Backers!

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Backyard Bald Eagles, Washington Coast Snowy Owl (prints available.)



Kate Davis photos ©

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