

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

# Raptor Round-Up

www.raptorsoftherockies.org  
 See a color version of the newsletter  
 www.raptorsoftherockies.com  
 Photography and Book web site

NUMBER 50, APR 2016

## Our iPod On Airplanes

One Teaching Team bird is flying higher than actually possible, appearing on airplanes around the world. Our Northern Pygmy-Owl iPod is part of the fleet of Frontier Airlines' largest new Airbus A321, his likeness painted on 19 tail sections plus on 100 older jets. Crazy how this came about – iPod was one of four raptors at a program at Frontier CEO Bill Franke's home three years ago. He joined the Peregrine, Golden Eagle and Great Horned Owl for a gathering of 35 international airline executives from nine different countries. The Pygmy-Owl impressed Bill because they are the greatest predators out there, pound for pound (or gram for gram.) Everyone thinks they are so adorable, but they can kill animals twice their size. I remind kids that if they were three feet tall they might eat third-graders.



The story written by pal Perry Backus made the papers: "Being an aviation enthusiast myself, this is the greatest tribute to our tiny predator iPod – to be honored in a 20-foot-tall painting on an aircraft tail," Davis said. Well, maybe not that big, and sort of a whimsical-looking portrait, but the only owl cruising at an altitude of 40,000 feet.



iPod perched in front of the iMac, tail photo in the background

## Issue Number Fifty!

I just took a trip down Memory Lane, looking through my file of old Raptor Round-Up's, beginning with this first issue in 1998. It's held together with paperclips because all the graphics were cut out with scissors and pasted on with glue and falling apart. In Number 1 I brag that we had done "over 460 programs for more than 40,000 participants." Wow. Right now we're up to 1583 appearances, 127,801 people of all ages in live appearances. Plus this issue was done on a black-and-white laptop Mac, pre-digital camera and pre-InDesign. These are a lot easier to put together now since I started writing a Blog most days. RR-U's come out three times a year, take a week to write, minutes to read, and in color on the web. Call me old-fashioned (and everyone does) but I still mail a few hundred hard copies, with a little eagle head drawing on each one.



Sibley the Peregrine on her last day of flying and hunting for the season, Easter Sunday.

## 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.

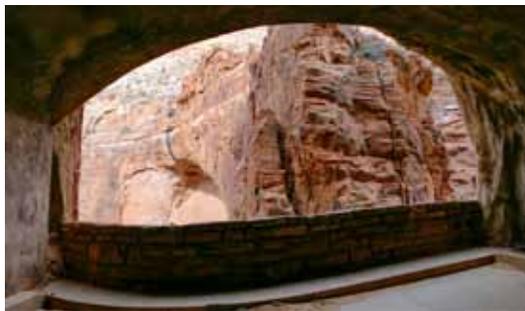
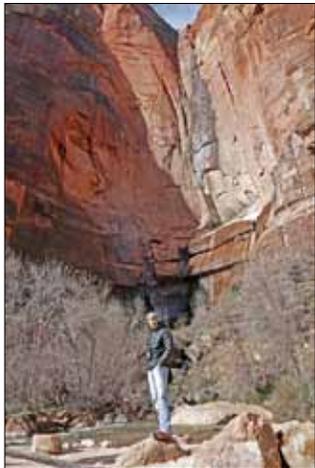


Kate Davis photos ©

## St. George Winter Bird Festival, Utah

**A** highlight and treat, I was invited to speak as the keynote for Red Cliff's Audubon annual Winter Birds Festival in southwestern Utah, the scenic city of St. George. I was met by my friend Joseph Dane from HawkWatch International in Salt Lake and spent a day in Zion National Park checking out the birds. New country for me and what rock and vistas!

Saturday I was lucky enough to attend two programs at the Tonaquint Nature Center by Nikki Wayment and uber-volunteer Winston Brundige of HawkWatch. When a youngster wanted to pet the Screech-Owl, Winston demonstrated the owl's ripping and biting skills on his glove! No petting the Teaching Team. My banquet keynote address was really fun (maybe a bit on the animated end) and everyone hooted up an owl at to finish the event, right on! I am invited back next year as a tourist.



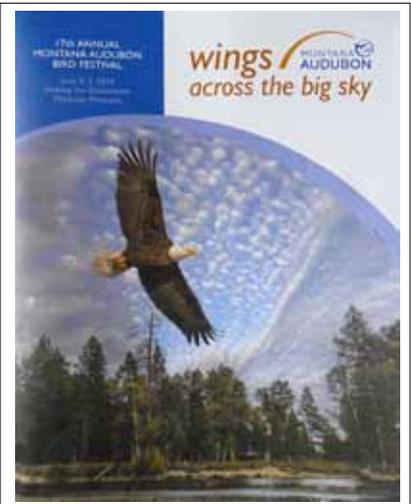
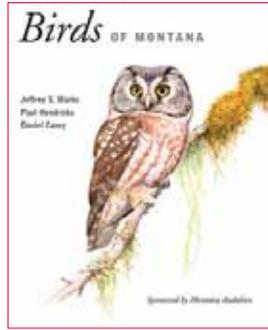
TOP: Zion National Park birdwalk  
 ABOVE: My host Steve Eberhard to the right of the poster, R.J. Hughes with Red Cliffs Audubon on the left.  
 LEFT: A view through the tunnel at Zion NP  
 FAR LEFT: Joseph Dane at Zion, plus Winston and owl

Kate Davis photos ©



# 17th Annual Montana Audubon Bird Festival

The Big Fest Returns to Missoula, the first time in 6 years and Audubon is on a roll. Bird fans across the Big Sky will be coming in droves for three days of field trips, programs and camaraderie. Director Steve Hoffman is just back from the 30th Anniversary of HawkWatch International in Salt Lake City. His legacy lives as it's founder, the premiere organization involved in raptor migration in the west and inspiration to uncountable other enthusiasts. We'll celebrate raptors but of course all avian neighbors in the area. Plus the new book *Birds of Montana* will be available!



The cover of the flier and this is described as a "photo taken in the beautiful Bitterroot Valley." It is actually two photos, one of the clouds over the nest with the tiny camera and another of an eagle flying by with the giant one. "Photochopped" as my brother calls it! That would be a near-impossible shot to get with bird and background in focus.

## Peregrines Are Awesome



It's been quite the season for Peregrines and they'll be here for a while, inhabiting cliffs over waterways across the countryside. Falcons don't build nests, and just use a shallow "scrape" on a ledge, usually inaccessible to terrestrial predators. They return to their haunts as early as February, courtship the month of April, sitting tight on eggs for May and then fledging in late June and early July. Noisy young chase their parents around and a great time to be a spectator.

The photo on the left is of a Peregrine on the Blackfoot that mated in a tree, then flew downstream and came back from a cache somewhere with a large prey item. Close scrutiny proved it to be a duck, maybe a teal. Then Mac Donofrio and I were treated to a parade of accipiters up One Horse Creek - two Cooper's Hawks flying all over the canyon in tandem, then two Sharp-shinned Hawks, perhaps migrating north. Finally a pair of Peregrines flew below us on the cliff face, whew. We were getting a little worried in typical falcon-watcher fashion. Mac reports that we have 12 eyries (nests) in the Bitterroot this year, his long hours of observation paying off. My Mom and I are having pleasurable afternoons in lawn chairs doing similar monitoring. She can spot them, new binoculars and patience.



Mookie top, Mom up the Blackfoot

## The Artists' Shop BirdFest, Month of June

Multimedia Avian Art with sculptor Steve Thorstenson, photographs by Kate Davis and surprise guests to be announced. Opening reception Friday, June 3rd.

127 N. Higgins, Downtown Missoula Local Art and Fine Craft

### ✦ Upcoming Public Raptor Programs:

**Saturday, June 4** *17th Annual Montana Audubon Bird Festival in Missoula:* Mark your calendars for three days of field trips and speakers, Friday evening Keynote the awesome Dr. Erick Greene, Saturday luncheon Keynote is Raptors of the Rockies. Holiday Inn Missoula Downtown.

**Saturday, July 23** *Bannack State Park and Ghost town:* Our umpteenth program at our favorite park, in the campground, free and open to everyone starting at 2 p.m. sharp. Four birds and fun!

THURSDAY, JANUARY 7, 2016

## Ducks at the Motel

It cracks me up that I went duck hunting with Sib all yesterday, falcon in perfect position and nothing, but these ducks across from the old Safeway in downtown Missoula are hanging out in a motel parking lot!



SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 2016

## Two Photos

These two photographs were practically back to back in my camera. The Black-billed Magpie image was taken just now in my yard, Sibley the Peregrine yesterday afternoon at One Horse Creek. Eerie....but true. Not kidding!



Kate Davis photos©

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2016

## Miles the Owl and Ron Austing

My friends from the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory noticed from my Facebook post that I was wearing their t-shirt, my favorite and I always get comments on the beautiful design. Here is another photo from the MTPR show last week - Annie checking out the Ron Austing photo of a hooting Great Horned Owl, an image that graces our mantelpiece. I met Ron when I was in the Junior Zoologists Club at the Cincinnati Zoo in 1974, and have treasured his photographs, books and laughs that we shared when he came to the Raptor Ranch. He wrote in my copy of his title *The World of the Great Horned Owl*, "36 years after the fact!" Sadly Ron passed away in 2014, a dear friend and hero.



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13, 2016

## Spring Cleaning

Time to rake out and power wash the buildings, replace pine needles, plus perch material for some. Top is the Swainson's/Rough-legged Hawk building, and lower the little owls and Sonora the Aplomado Falcon enclosures. I filled up buckets of sand down at the beach and hauled them up in the wheelbarrow. Twice a year.



TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2016

## Bitterroot Bass Fever!

This billboard near Lolo informs drivers on 93 that they entering the Bass Fishing Mecca of the Bitterroot. I wonder who thought this one up, and where you could find a bass around here. Perhaps some stocked farm pond somewhere...Could it have been a little confusion between bass and trout? Speed boats, lakes, bait versus drift boats, rivers, flies. Cracks me up every time I drive by that sign - Small Towns, Big Adventures, Bass Galore. Huh? ps: I stand corrected. Bass have been introduced in many places (Metcalf NWR, etc.) My point was that these are not the target species for 99% of anglers here. pss:I posted this on FaceBook and it was covered in the local newspapers!, Perry Backus to the rescue once again.



TUESDAY, APRIL 12, 2016

## Airplane Ride with Erick

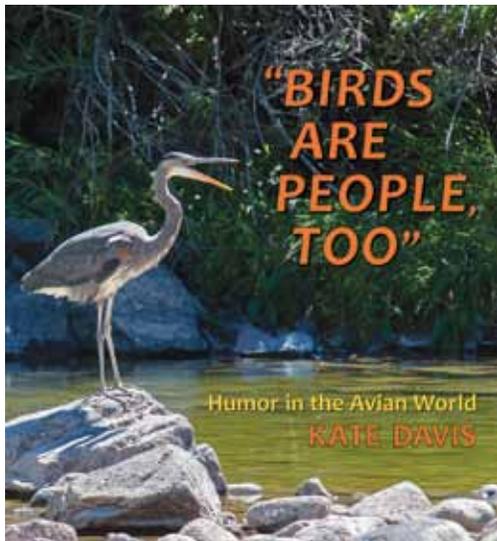
The weather was perfect last Thursday for a flight up to Flathead Lake, courtesy pilot Dr. Erick Greene. He knows how much I love aviation and dream of being a pilot some day. We skirted the Mission Mountains and spied on all of the potholes up by Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge, formed when the retreating glacier dropped off big ice-cycles the size of skyscrapers. So that's how those potholes were formed. He showed me the little airstrip in Polson, approach one way over the cliffs of the Flathead River, the other direction right over the lake. Thanks Erick and hope we can fly around the Big Skies again.



# New Book!

Out this summer, Mountain Press Publishing Company. The back cover touts:

When you see a bird diving for a fish, landing on a perch, or singing from a fence post, do you wonder what it's saying or thinking? While staking out nests or waiting for the perfect shot on cold mornings, photographer Kate Davis has wondered plenty. In *Birds Are People, Too*, she lets her imagination fly with humorous takes at the avian world, from young owls pondering if their parents will really kick them out the nest to a sleepy robin that awoke too late to get the worm. You'll be entertained and amazed by this extraordinary collection of more than 100 never-before-published action photos of 62 bird species.



Sonora the Aplomado Falcon hangs out in the house for a few hours a day, spoiled rotten. She lets me know when the cat enters the room with a squawk, but otherwise is very well-behaved on her perch on the bookcase. She was a gift as a tiny chick from The Peregrine Fund in 2013.



## Montana Public Radio



Miles (Davis) the Great Horned Owl discussing their breeding season and right, Annie describes the malar stripes on the face of Wes the kestrel. Great descriptions for the listeners Annie, thanks for the photos Sam!

My favorite "appearances" are actually on the radio, Pea Green Boat childrens' programming on MTPR. Host Annie Garde and I have a great chat for an hour every two months, several raptors along for the ride. This is the longest-running and most beloved kids programming on the radio, *anywhere*. Annie took over as Skipper when Marcia Dunn retired in 2003, and is the perfect host with songs, stories, and a wide range of guests. We know that a huge portion of the audience started listening with their children and are still hooked long after the kids are gone. Sam Manno also hosts PGB and The Children's Corner on Saturdays, so lots of programming for the younger set (and lots of us olders as well.) I always go on Thursdays so I can listen to my other favorite show Jazz Sessions, 2-4 pm with Terry Conrad (and Jon Jackson!)



Left of the FM dial, KUFM 89.1 in Missoula and streaming at [mtp.org](http://mtp.org)

Pea Green Boat weekdays 4-5 pm

Children's Corner Saturday 7-9 am

## Birds in the Back (and Front) Yards



Kate Davis photos ©



# Go Hellgate Hawks!

We had a program for a gym-full of kids in March, 530 to be exact at Hellgate Elementary School. They were the best-behaved group EVER, and you could have heard a pin drop when they all came in, instructed by principal Chris Clevenger to be quiet so as to not frighten the birds. They all did "golf claps" after each bird, a very quiet round of applause.

We first set foot in that school in 1989, back when I would do two or three programs in a row with six or seven birds. I worked at Bitterroot Taxidermy with Wayne Lundberg, and he'd let me take a day or two off in the spring to do school programs from Dillon to St. Regis to Plains.



Hellgate Elementary adopted a hawk every year as their mascot, a penny drive organized by teacher Kathy Meyers who retired last year (after 30 years!) She'd have big graphs in the hallways, students posting the running tally per classroom, quite the competition. They had photos of our first Red-tail Clive and Otto the Rough-leg on the walls surrounding the office, the Hellgate Hawks. One time, Deja the Harris's Hawk was doing a flight demonstration and she decided to perch on that basketball hoop until everyone had left. As they were filing out I pointed and said "Stay!" so the kids thought she was well-trained. To the left, a group portrait with my young pal Aidan flashing us a peace sign.



## Bald Eagle Nest Update

I was getting very worried, in a photographer's doldrums. I figured the eagles on the river behind the house were skipping a year of breeding after the last four years of heroics. Both adults hang out all year, and were mating and bringing in nesting material, but not settling down to incubate. Then on March 12th, she poked her head above the rim of sticks and called when the male flew high overhead. Sure looked increasingly like she was on eggs, two weeks later than last year. Lots of hours of changing of the guard and not much else to photograph.

I had written the word HATCH on my calendar in gold letters, predicting the 17th as the day the eagles would see a chick, a 35-day incubation period. Sure enough, that evening he flew in with a lovely headless Columbian Ground Squirrel, dropped it off in the nest and the female stood ripping off pieces and feeding something! It will be weeks before we see the little white head or heads. The eagles fly across the river and return three minutes later with a ground squirrel, two in less than ten minutes recently. I think I'll spend some time watching the squirrel colonies across the road in May and June and try to figure out how he catches them so easily. It's as if he just opens the refrigerator door for a meal. Updates on the way.



The first Osprey I'd seen all year and a skirmish in the skies. He had some fish clenched in a foot and was probably just migrating through.



Kate Davis photos ©

## THANK-YOU NOTES FROM HELLGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Our Friend Jo Fix has been teaching elementary school students for 30 years and is leaving her legacy of inspiring awesome young naturalists to retire this spring. She sent us a packet of letters from her 3rd graders after our program in March with these quotes:

"The information you gave me will help me if I ever have a test on birds." **Adalyn**

"I learned how hawks, birds, and the raptors hunt for their food. It will be useful if I want to teach about birds." **Preston**

"The information will be helpful when I'm older because I can tell my children." **Quinlan**



"Thank you for coming to our school and showing the birds of prey and telling us about falcons and owls. These are facts that I can tell my parents." **Isaach**

"You are the beast! (I think she meant best.) You are as good as the girl on America's Got Talent. I watch it every year. You look just like her. You are awesome for helping birds. They are a great part of nature. Owls are my favorite birds in the world." **Emma**



# Our Raptors: and Sponsorship Appreciated!



Max the Golden Eagle



Evita the Swainson's Hawk



Owen the Northern Saw-whet Owl



Mookie and Peanut and Audrey the cat at the beach

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

## Our Teaching Team



Sonora the Aplomado Falcon



Sonny the Bald Eagle



photos by  
Kate Davis,  
Executive  
Director



Jillian the Great Horned Owl



Otto the Rough-legged Hawk



Sibley the Peregrine Falcon



iPod the Northern Pygmy-Owl



Nigel the Golden Eagle



Ansel the Gyrfalcon/Peregrine



Ella and Wes the American Kestrels



Miles the Great Horned Owl



Alisa the Red-tailed Hawk



Raptor Ranch, Bitterroot Mountains in March,  
Eagle Enclosure on the river



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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!

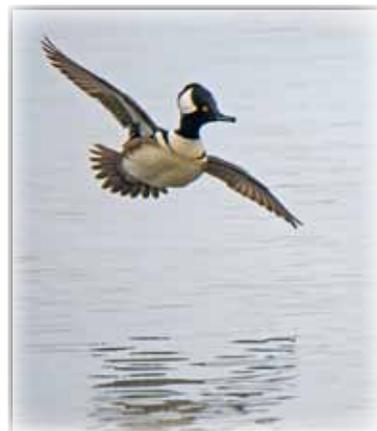
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Special thanks to Jodi and  
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in Missoula!



Kate Davis photos ©

Greeting cards and t-shirts  
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## Raptors of the Rockies

Educational Programs since 1988

