

RAPTOR VIEW

RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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Letter from the President....

A big hello and welcome to Raptor View Research Institute's first newsletter! In the future the letter from the president will address emerging developments in raptor research both here at RVRI and in the greater raptor research community. While the new year is usually a time to look to the future, I would like to take this opportunity to give you a glimpse of the journey that led me to become a committed researcher of these beautiful and ecologically essential birds of prey.

When I was twenty years old I was led to a site by my childhood friend and fellow outdoor enthusiast Phil Rodriguez. From the Appalachian Trail along Kittatinny Ridge overlooking the Delaware River is where I first witnessed raptors riding on thermals and updrafts. The site, called Racoon Ridge, was being used by a raptor biologist, Tom Laurel, conducting a 'hawk count' using a plastic Great Horned Owl decoy high atop a fifteen foot pole. The first bird of the day and my very first raptor at this site was a tenacious little Merlin. This Merlin came zipping in at the plastic Great Horned Owl and did five very tight circles within a few seconds. It then flew off down ridge, "dogfighting" with an equally aggressive little Sharp-shinned Hawk. As they disappeared into the distance, I felt a feeling overcome me; it was raptor fever, and it has been a life long "obsession" ever since.

Tom became my mentor, explaining bits of science relating to ridgeline migration and guiding me through the subtleties of in-flight raptor identification. I continued to observe hawks with Tom for years to come and that experience still exerts a

profound effect on my life to this day.

At twenty-seven I decided to join my uncle who had moved west to Missoula from New Jersey years before. I had visited Montana several times since I was twelve and now

decided this wild and rugged country was where I wanted to make my home.

Once in Montana I worked as a roofer for my uncle and it was on a roof that I truly found my calling. It was a cool, sunny fall day on a roof west of Missoula and I decided to take lunch down by the Clark Fork River. As I sat down to eat, I began noticing a few Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks flying at tree-top height. Before I knew it, I was observing several dozen hawks an hour and was witnessing a full-on hawk migration event. I spent the rest of the day on the banks of the river, returning to the roof only to clean up. Raptor migration fever was once again pumping through my veins!

I felt sure that there was a count site in western MT where I could once again observe the spectacle of fall raptor migration. I couldn't wait! I soon learned, however, that I would have to. I contacted HawkWatch International's founder and then Executive Director, Steve Hoffman, to find where they were conducting observations. It turned out no observations were being conducted around Missoula. The Bridger Mountains site in Bozeman, discovered by Fred and Cathy Tilly, was the closest place and out of the question for me. I needed to find a place where I could work a day roofing and then hawk watch for a day. I soon learned this would be a pattern in my life for years to come. Picking up on my enthusiasm and learning of the flight I had observed, Steve Hoffman sent me some exploratory data sheets and encouraged me to go out and find a viable raptor migration count site.

I spent roughly the next 10 years attending the University of Montana in the spring and searching out raptor migration sites in the fall. All the while working as a roofer to pay the bills and finance my raptor obsession.



*RVRI President
Rob Domenech*



Free at Last! Releasing a Golden Eagle



Merlin Wing

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EDUCATION



As apex predators, raptors are a compelling focus for teaching students about basic ecological principles and conservation issues. Raptors command a certain respect and sense of "awe" due to their size, beauty and simply by virtue of their predatory design and ecological roles.

Programs that reach our community, especially blossoming biologists, are an important part of Raptor View. We mainly offer sessions to high school age students and adults, but if there is a group of students you would like to see exposed to raptor identification, trapping techniques and ecology, please do not hesitate to contact us.

High School

The high school programs consist of a series of days in the field, identifying and banding raptors. In the winter and spring this takes place in one of the nearby valleys where there is a known abundance of birds. In the fall, we invite students to join us on Rogers Pass to experience a scientific trapping station first hand. Our programs have been enjoyed by Willard School, a local alternative high school and Missoula Youth Homes: Radke House and Talbot House.

Members of Missoula Youth Homes



University

Similar programs exist for university classes. Professor Erick Green from the University of Montana has brought his Ecology classes to Rogers Pass for the last 4 years. We also have many volunteer opportunities available for students who are interested in lending a hand and gaining important field research experience.

Community

Slide shows and bird identification workshops keep us busy when there are fewer eagles flying. Through Audubon meetings we have met many enthusiastic hawk watchers in Montana. Also in the spring of 2004, Raptor View offered a free program during the Missoula Bike Associations' Bike to Work week.

Raptor View is lucky enough to collaborate with other non-profits, such as Raptors of the Rockies, The Glacier Institute and Montana Water Trust through donations of field days with our experienced biologists.



Willard School Student Rochelle Misenar with an American Kestrel

Future Education Projects

We want to include more programs that cater to younger students of grammar school age. Our preliminary programs with this age group show great potential. We have found these students are remarkably inquisitive and fascinated by these birds. Currently we are working on ways to include this age group into our educational programs.

With the development of other migratory raptor research sites, especially sites that do not focus on elusive Golden Eagles, we can offer many more natural history and raptor education programs that focus on younger participants and larger groups.

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Through the years I scouted dozens of sites. Eventually my exploration brought me away from interior ridges and out near the Rocky Mountain Front. It was here, with the invaluable advice and guidance from Fred Tilly, that the Rogers Pass site was established.

Raptor View is committed to expanding the world's knowledge of these raptors through our research and by reaching out to the community and students of all ages and backgrounds. We hope to bring awareness to the beauty that is flying above. Perhaps some students will even start their own journey toward working with these magnificent creatures just as was done to me those many years ago on that ridge overlooking the Delaware River.



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FALL 2004: A SEASON ON THE HILL



A Golden Eagle on the bird scale. Weight and other data are carefully collected in the banding tent before the raptors are released.



RVRI Biologist Tim Pitz and young hawk watchers Kestrel, Cree and Jade with a Golden Eagle awaiting data processing.



RVRI Treasurer Victoria Parks with a hooded Golden Eagle. Though surprisingly docile, one must watch out for their powerful talons.



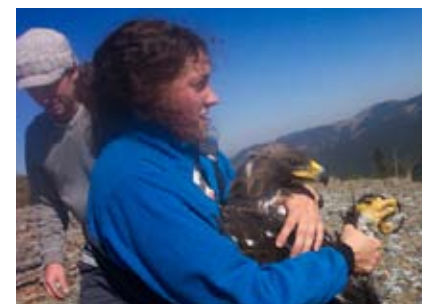
Dave Taylor and Elaine Harmon visiting Kate Davis' Raptor Ranch. Seen is Deja the Harris Hawk.



Raptor Specialist Roger Jones and Rob with 2nd year female (left) and adult male Northern Goshawks



RVRI Biologist Maureen Essen holding a Rough-Legged Hawk, one of the buteo species that may visit the site.



RVRI Biologist Sharon Fuller and a recently trapped Golden Eagle.



The tail feathers of a juvenile Golden Eagle displayed to their full glory.

We are a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Your donations assure the continuation of our Research and Educational projects

I'd like to help Raptor View Research Institute

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Please make **tax deductible** donations payable to **Raptor View Research Institute (RVRI)** and send with this form to **P.O. Box 4323 Missoula, MT 59806**.

RESEARCH 2004



Golden Eagles and fall raptor migration

This fall we successfully completed our 2004 season of our Rogers Pass Golden Eagle and raptor migration monitoring and banding project.

Our overall number of observed raptor migrants was down a little from past season's count numbers. This was likely due to inverted weather conditions, where we had successive days of cloud cover over our site with fair weather conditions just off to the east and west. This occurred during what is typically our peak migration times for Cooper's Hawks in September and Golden Eagles in October. Basically we couldn't see or trap passing migrants. For the season we counted **1448** raptors total with **724** Golden Eagles observed, down about 200.

The success of this season was made possible through support from you and our team of dedicated research biologists and many committed volunteers. The Continental Divide is a challenging place to work, where wind speeds of 20 – 30 mph are the norm and gust of 40+ mph are not uncommon. Dramatic cloud formations and cover, compounded by temperature extremes, sometimes changing by the minute, make our site a weather watcher's dream and sometimes a raptor researcher's nightmare. We love the Rocky Mountain Front with all its wildness and are already looking forward to next season's work!

Red-tailed Hawks

We are assisting researchers from the University of Arkansas in a innovative study, looking at foot-pad size to accurately distinguish between male and female Red-tailed Hawks. Currently, thousands of Red-tails are caught annually where sex is unknown.

Swainson's Hawks

This spring we will initiate a Swainson's Hawk nesting and productivity study in the Missoula and surrounding valleys. Additionally, we will increase our exploratory effort to locate viable spring and fall migration point count and banding sites in west-central Montana, to better our understanding of raptor movements and migratory ecology. Many of these activities can be shared with the public and incorporated into our expanding educational outreach.

THANKS! *RVRI would like to offer our heartfelt thanks to the following local businesses and organizations that donated both goods and services to our organization. Their generosity is greatly appreciated.*

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