



days at  
Dunrovin

February 2019



**Ranch  
Talk**



## The Latest Gossip From Dunrovin Ranch



**American Goldfinch**

### Winter's Birds



**Pileated Woodpecker**

Not every bird is a snowbird that heads for warmer climes as winter descends on Montana. Of the 424 different bird species that occur in Montana, 177 of them over-winter in the state, including 13 birds of prey. Winter bird watching is not limited to those who enjoy tromping through forest or field in snowshoes, binoculars in hand. Everyone can enjoy winter birds by simply installing and maintaining backyard bird feeders. Winter's scarcity ensures that local birds will find feeders hung with thistle, seeds, or suet. Larger birds of prey often follow, looking for the smaller birds that frequent those feeders.

Dunrovin Ranch has taken winter birdwatching via bird feeders to new heights—literally! Dunrovin's osprey nest is situated atop a 47-foot pole. The nest not only supports the ospreys during their breeding season from late March through mid-September, it has evolved into something of an avian condominium. During the summer months, sparrows and starlings use the catacombs created by the entwined branches of the huge nest for their own nests. It a synergistic arrangement. The little birds help keep the nest clean and disease free, while the ospreys, who eat only fish, provide the small birds with protection by warding off other birds of prey.



**House Sparrow**



**Northern Flicker**



**House finch**

# Birds of a Feather — Dunrovin's Bird Feeders are Busy!



**European Starling**



**Red-winged Blackbird**



**Black-billed Magpie**

Winter months, however, create a very different situation. Four bird feeders with thistle, sunflower seeds, and suet hang from the ospreys' nest perch to provide a secure food source that attracts a variety of birds. The congregation of the avian seed eaters then bring in the birds of prey. All this action is within view of Dunrovin Ranch's webcam and can be heard through its ambient microphone. Webcam viewers know a bird of prey has landed when the constant chirp of the gathered seed-and-suet eaters suddenly stops.

Hawks and falcons are a patient lot. Standing rigidly still for long periods of time, they scan the area with their keen and laser-focused eyes, waiting for an unsuspecting sparrow, finch, chickadee, or starling to make a wrong move. Often these vigils do not produce the desired results on the part of the predators. Other times, these standoffs end in a sudden burst of feathers and the screech of a small bird as the raptor scores its own meal.



**Cooper's Hawk**



**Merlin Falcon**



**Sharp Shinned Hawk**

The close and intimate observations afforded by the web camera can make the ordinary seem extraordinary and foster a greater appreciation of the birds' beauty, complexity, and struggles. Statuesque moments of raptors lying in wait for prey allow camera operators to caress the bird's body from head to talons and marvel at the intricate color variations among its feathers. A close-up image of a raptor's unflinching stare directly into the camera betters the dictionary definition of the phrase "hawk-eyed scrutiny."

