

From: Days At Dunrovin contact@daysatdunrovin.com
Subject: Hard News and Hopeful Signs
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To: MARYANNSTEGGLES@ICLOUD.COM



Every day, a new adventure!

Join us at [DaysAtDunrovin](#) for access to our four nature cams, community chatting, and fun on the ranch!

Updates from the Ranch

We have hard news to share from the nest. Mo – our first-hatched chick this year – has died. She was last seen on August 24th and was recovered three days later. Evidence points to an encounter with a great horned owl that has been known to perch near the river camera. Ranch owner SuzAnne found her there while operating the river webcam and contacted Rob from [Raptor View Research Institute](#). Rob, Dunrovin Tech Guru James, and SuzAnne's husband Sterling retrieved her body. When Rob later did x-rays, he noted injuries to her head and neck consistent with an owl strike. It's also possible she'd been fighting illness.

We know this news comes hard to many who watched these four chicks grow and fledge this summer. It's important to remember that these are wild birds living wild lives – and that the owl is wild, too – and there is only so much we can protect them from. ~~They all deserve our compassion, but even more, they deserve to continue~~

... they all deserve our compassion, but even more, they deserve to continue being free wild animals as untouched by humans as possible.

We may have found Mo sooner if the camera had been working properly, but it's been malfunctioning, fixed on a view of the river and sandbar. Our thanks goes out to Rob, James, and Sterling for retrieving her with great care. It's rare to have a nest of four osprey chicks all survive to take flight, but once they do they face the most dangerous periods of their lives directly following that as they become perhaps the best fishers on this planet. Many die as they learn to fish, or from other raptors in these early forays away from the nest. Sadly, that was the case for Mo and while it breaks our hearts we also know that she will live on in all the people who took the time to know her from afar thanks to these cams.

To commemorate Mo's brief but precious life, I Love put together a series of screen captures for this newsletter:



Mo with her siblings.





Mo liked to stay on the south perch a lot of the time.



Mo from the Ranch Camera on the nest perch.

We know this news brings a mix of feelings. Watching so closely means carrying both joy and sorrow. Our guiding approach remains the same – minimal interference unless there's immediate human caused danger – keeping these birds as wild as they were meant to be.

There's also some small solace in that the rest of the brood is on the move. The two middle chicks were last seen on September 5th (Minie and Meanie) and are presumed to have begun migration, while the youngest, Eenie, is still nearby – hanging out mostly in the trees and coming to the nest for fish. Winnie hasn't been seen since August thirty-first, and Swoop continues to provision the youngest with his steady resolve. And, thanks to Sandee, we have news on a chick from years

past! Check out her photos below for more!

September is a liminal month in Montana and you see it all around the nest – osprey departures, lingerings, and a sky that suddenly feels larger. On the ground, Gertie gave us another little scare with a second hoof abscess. The farrier came and drained it, and the great staff of ranch hands have been diligently giving her soothing hoof baths. She's tolerating the routine like a pro and already looks brighter and is back walking confidently again. Pretty soon, she'll be ready **for more adventures like this one on the state land.**



Video courtesy of Michal from a recent donkey adventure.

There's up in the horses, too. Lonza and Oggy are off quarantine and back with the herd – tails up, spirits high, happy to be in open pasture again. After Clicking, Oggy couldn't resist showing off his spins for Mackenzie – all gusto – as if to say, "Missed me?"

As always, our thanks to ILove, Celia, and of course Ellie, and the whole community for such thoughtful eyes on the ranch. We'll keep sharing all the happenings – the hard and the heartening – as the seasons turn.

Photos with Sandee

We're lucky to see the world through Sandee McLaughlin's lens every newsletter. Recently, while scouting the Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge south of Dunrovin, she spotted a banded osprey on a pole. SuzAnne confirmed the blue leg band as 4C, one of Dunrovin's youngsters from a couple years back. Here's a few photos of this chick who successfully fledged and returned – plus a front-row sequence of an osprey's plunge, splash, and lift-off with lunch.

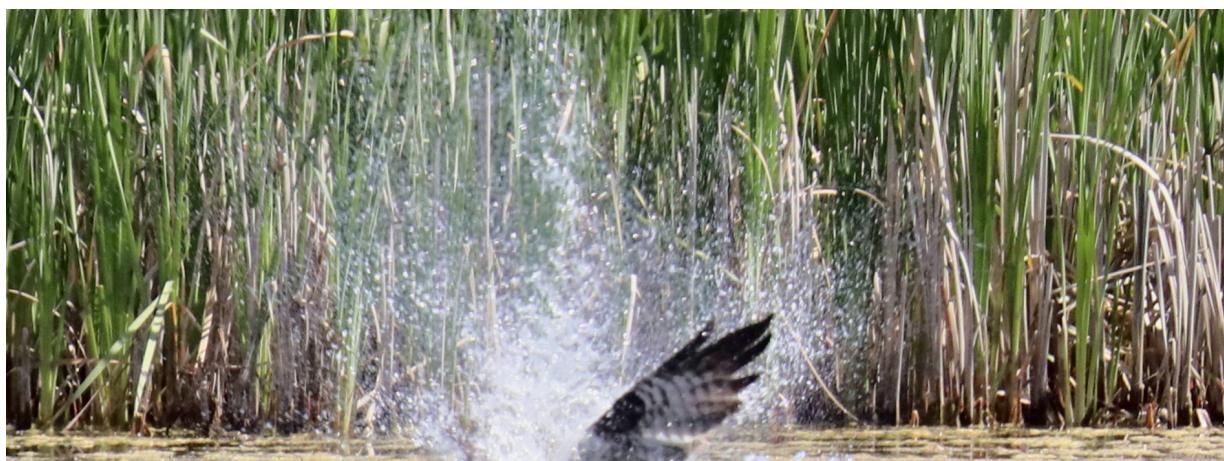




4C on a post, band in view.



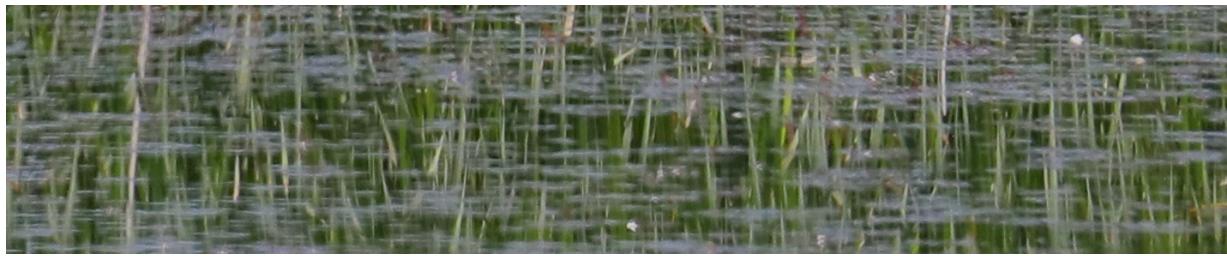
Banded Dunrovin youngster sighted at Lee Metcalf eating fish for lunch.



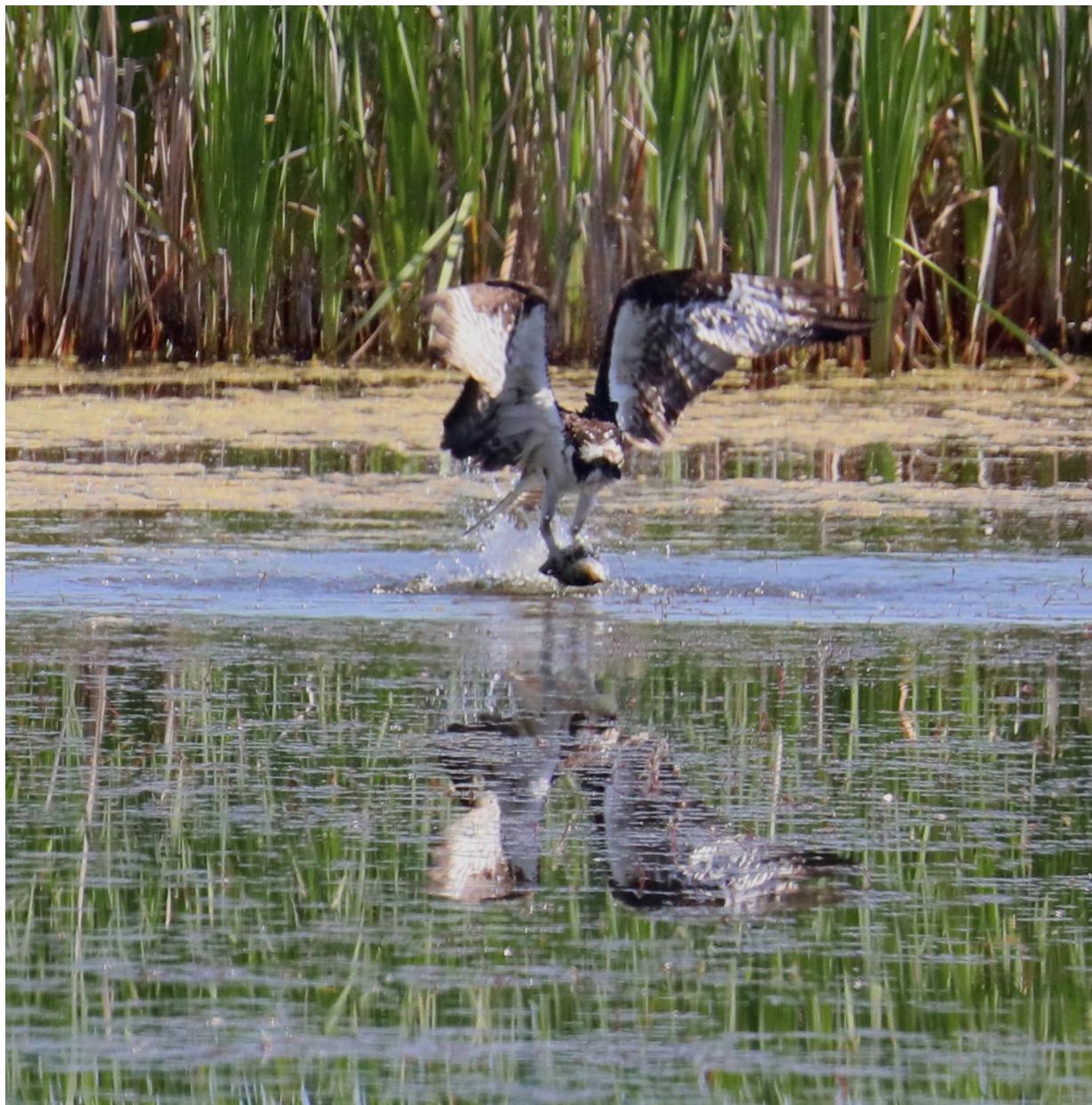


The plunge.





Head still above water.



Water take-off.





Catch secured.





Sharing the sky with a passing heron.



Iconic.

Clicking

At long last the smoke cleared, and we finally had a pleasant warm day for Clicking – and the donkeys came in buzzing. Maude was so amped she fended off a Captain

from Michal during setup, and both Divas kept nudging us to start early. It actually made setting up a little tricky, but we got there.

We kicked off in the round pen with Gertie's vigorous return to painting. She chose yellow and went at it with gusto – decorating the canvas, the mounting block it rested on, and, ahem, a bit of Michal and Mackenzie, too.

Then we pulled out something we haven't touched in two or three years: a mirror. Last time the mirror drew skepticism and a touch of trepidation; this time both donkeys targeted it confidently. We ran a few quick-and-dirty tests to see if they might notice treats visible only via the mirror. Hard to say whether they used the reflection or just excellent peripheral vision, but Maude did end both mirror sessions by pausing to stare contemplatively at herself, which was awfully cute. Gertie looked more puzzled – searching for treats rather than worrying about what that shiny square was about.

Nose work came next, and both Divas zipped to the morel hide with their usual enthusiasm. In the arena on the way back Gertie insisted on a round of "What Else Can You Do?" – our 101 Things to Do with a Mounting Block game – while Maude drilled her left and right stomps. We wrapped with a little musicality on the ukulele and two pleasantly tired donkeys doing their best to participate through to the end.

That's all for this time – clear skies, bright strokes, and a thoughtful look in the mirror. See you next time.





Leave It from apples in the field!

What the Cameras Don't See

Most nights at Dunrovin, we know what our animals are up to. Thanks to our infrared cameras and the dedication of our devoted observers, we can often see exactly where the donkeys choose to wander, checking over the fill dirt for missed grain, or romping. We see what time the ospreys return to the nest or roost on a pole in the field (if they do at all).

But every now and then, the donkeys drift just out of frame, or a tail flicks on the edge of the screen. Or there is a half-heard bray in the distance. A flash of motion in the orchard where a mysterious guest has been leaving behind cherry pits in their scat. Could be a raccoon. Might be a skunk. Or perhaps something even stranger. The cherries are always quick to go.

The red willows and cottonwoods in the riparian corridor hide more than just the ospreys fishing. Our cameras have spotted foxes and coyotes, and we know that bobcats, bears, and cougars have passed through as well. Sometimes, the air feels different down there – like you're not alone, even when you are. Often, you'll look up to find a red tail hawk watching.

And then there are the surprises you hear about secondhand – like the neighbor who looked out his window to see a Dunrovin horse (we're pretty sure it was Butte) not just drinking from the pond, but swimming. A full-body, hoof-kicking, slow-motion swim in the water. Why? Only that horse knows.

These are the moments we'll never quite catch. The quiet ones. The off-camera ones. The ones that remind us that even on a ranch full of cameras, not everything gets seen. But even when the cameras appear quiet, there's always something stirring.



Throwback screen captures from our Ranch Cam of one of the many foxes that have visited the ranch.

Filed by Agents Gertie and Maude

Agent Maude, reporting from the west-facing homestall with moderate visibility and an excellent view of the sky:

We are pleased to report that the gray ghost that has overtaken the air has finally lifted. For the better part of a month, it hung heavy in the trees, smudging out the sun and casting a blur over all operations. The humans call it smoke, but around here it is better known as the creep. It creeps into nostrils, into breakfast, into thoughts. It turns the world yellow and suspicious.

There are many theories about its origin. Some claim the sky itself is burning. Others suspect it is caused by humans making many small fires in the woods. Agent Maude believes it is clearly bonfire smoke – the same stuff the humans made during her evening security rounds last October, just somehow a lot more of it.

Agent Gertie, reporting from her post near the front gate where she remained valiantly unbothered for the duration of the event, strongly disagrees:

Many of us right minded donkeys maintain that no number of bonfires could fog the entire sky. The world, is not that big. It's maybe one week as a donkey walks in all directions, tops.

We champion the sky mold theory. According to this explanation, the creep is the result of too much summer heat making the clouds go bad like the apples on the ground in the orchard. Things rot. The clouds grow spores. The mold descends. It's science.

Whatever the cause, both agents concur its departure is welcome. The birds are louder. The horses are moving again. The hay tastes better. And the humans have resumed their usual nonsense. And we donkeys, ever prepared, remain alert. September is a trickster month. The creep has been known to return.

*Yours against the creep,
Agents Gertie and Maude
Senior Donkey Division – Air to Bray Task Force*



Agent Gertie explaining donkey superiority to Whiskey on a recent expedition.

We'll see you soon at www.daysatdunrovin.com and back here in two weeks for another newsletter from Dunrovin!

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