

## New Mississippi cliff with territorial falcons

River falcon survey 4/5/10

I set off early this day knowing that rain is on the way and the next few days would not be good for falcon watching. I was hoping to find the adult male at the Agri-bunge stack house in McGregor, IA perched where I could get a look at his jewelry. We quickly found the adult male but, he did not land in any spot that offered a view of his bands. I've tried at least a dozen times now to get this information with no luck.

Headed to Leo's Bluff near Waukon Junction where we found the adult female who does appear to be banded. Set off for the Lansing, IA power plant cliff and due to a major construction project we were not able to view the cliff from the plant property. We watched from directly below the cliff for about 15 minutes without seeing a falcon.

Heading upstream I was so very pleased to see an adult male falcon flying across the face of Dead Cow Bluff about 1.5 miles upstream from the Lansing power plant. We installed a nest box on this cliff about eight years ago. We've witnessed a single falcon visiting the nest box off and on over the years but this year we have an adult pair of falcons defending the cliff. The adult male is banded but poor light for viewing conditions. The adult female did not show her legs as she was in the nest box.

The small cliff that is 1.3 miles upstream of the town of Lansing where I located an adult male falcon on 3/28/10 appears to be void of falcons this morning.

On 3/28/10 I was pleased to find two falcons defending the Shellhorn cliff just south of Brownsville, MN. We did not locate a falcon today.

Returned downstream to Lansing, IA and crossed the bridge heading to the Lynxville, WI cliffs. We quickly located the adult male falcon perched on his favorite dead snag on Larson's Bluff. At one time he flew to the downstream cliff with a house up top and copulated with an adult female. She later flew upstream towards Larson's Bluff but, we were not able to locate her on the cliff face. We then made our way down to the Lock and Dam #9 cliff where in 2008 we had a breeding pair of falcons but, none in 2009. No falcons this day.

While driving I was thinking about the new pair of cliff nesting falcons at Dead Cow Bluff I began to wonder if these were the Lansing power plant falcons just moving a tad upstream. I had to know.. We crossed back over the river at the Lansing, IA bridge and made our way back to Dead Cow Bluff where we found two adult falcons once again. We then drove the Lansing Power plant cliff where we parked and walked on the trail directly below the cliff face. We quickly found an adult falcon in the upstream nest box mounted to the cliff. Shortly after, an adult male flew to snag just above the nest box. We installed this nest box a few years ago just above a favored ledge of the falcons. Each time the falcons have attempted to nest on this natural ledge raccoons have eaten the eggs or young each and every time. Our hopes were to

attract them to the next box that was raccoon safe. This is where they appear to be nesting this year.

The distance between the Lansing Power plant cliff and Dead Cow Bluff is apr. 1.5 miles however, there is a bend in the bluff line and both are out of direct sight from each other.

Even with the excitement of finding a new Mississippi River cliff nest site for falcons, I am perplexed as to why so many cliffs that have been productive in past seasons are vacant in 2010. With urban nest sites for the most part once you have established a successful nest, falcons tend to return year after year. Not so with Mississippi River cliffs.

No falcons at all this year at Maassen's Bluff. If memory serves, we have had adult falcons at this cliff for at least eight years and no sighting of any falcons this year. The very productive Castle Rock, WI cliff directly across the river from Winona, MN has not attracted a single falcon this year. Last year (2009) there was an adult pair for a brief period and even seen copulating but, move off to somewhere else. No falcons have been seen at Hussen's Bluff where over the last two springs we have witnessed adult falcons defending but, not breeding. No falcons at Pepin Heights cliff where there has been territorial falcons in 2007 and 2008 and none since.

I am at a loss to comprehend just why some cliffs that have attracted falcons in the past do not have falcons this year.

Rain is predicted for the next few days. I will return to the up river cliffs later this week.

Bob Anderson

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