



## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Amy and John with falcons, Maggie and Robert.

John Howe  
RRP Director

**W**elcome – I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter as much as I did! It has been an interesting and rewarding year, despite the unique challenges of the pandemic across our programs. While our families and routines have been turned upside down, things in the raptor world look pretty much the same. On reflection, I've realized that much of what affects us in the human world might not raise a feather in the natural world. But much of what we do has serious consequences on the wildlife around us, including raptors. Take for instance the impact of DDT on raptor populations and the recent extremes of weather and climate. Wildfires, droughts, record-breaking hurricanes, pesticide residues, and lead are devastating to humans and birds of prey. Managing and minimizing our impact on raptor habitat in the years to come will be critical to their survival, which means that our mission of education, stewardship, and creating a lasting connection between our two worlds has never been so important!

**Education:** On the education front, we have been growing our Education In Action program and we opened a new web interface with lesson plans and tools for teachers to use. Little did we know that the COVID-19 pandemic would shut down school as we know it and open the door for accelerated use of virtual learning programs and education tools. Our teachers led the way with teacher-created lessons, crafts, and activities that brought remote

learning into classrooms and homes around the country. You can find them here: [www.raptorresource.education](http://www.raptorresource.education)

Our raptor cam fans were treated to a relatively normal year at our eagle nests and we got to watch and enjoy five fledges. The raptor rehabilitation experts at SOAR did their magic and D32, the last 2019 Decorah fledgling in their care, recovered from a broken leg and was released in March as our 2020 eagle eggs were being laid! Our Decorah North Nest youngster DN12 fledged next, followed by the Decorah Fish Hatchery trio of D34, D35, and D36! The successful fledges helped soothe the sting of losing much-loved peregrine falcons Elise and Floyd at Great Spirit Bluff and an early end to what looked to be a promising year for the WI Kestrels. Both taught us more about the circle of life in the wild and competition for food between raptor species.

**Stewardship:** Research and conservation are key stewardship contributions of the Raptor Resource Project. We donned our gloves and masks to monitor and band 50 young peregrines in MN, IA, and WI. We would have banded significantly more falcons, but pandemic restrictions locked us out of several partner sites. One of our most exciting events was returning to Effigy Mounds National Monument for the banding of nestlings

*Message from the Director, continued on next page...*



John Howe banding falcon, Robert.

21 years after the Raptor Resource Project completed a historic two-year release of cliff-hacked falcons. Our project successfully reintroduced the post-DDT population of peregrine falcons to the historic cliff eyries they called home along the mighty Mississippi River. It was a joyous occasion with RRP Board members and crew attending, including John Dingley and Dave Kester who were critical in helping RRP founder Bob Anderson with the hard field work that resulted in the program's success.

It is hard to describe just how many people were involved in the events that led up to banding at Fire Point. Brett and Carole Mandernack worked with Bob to produce young falcons in captivity back in the mid-1980s. Bob engineered a plan for addressing nest-site imprinting with the help of our late Board president Rob MacIntyre and current Board president John Dingley. After Bob moved to Iowa, Dave Kester and John Dingley helped him build the special eyrie and hack the falcons. Pat Schlarbaum got the Iowa DNR involved in returning the Peregrine Falcon to Iowa's skies and provided a lot of hands-on help. The staff of Effigy Mounds supported this work and provided a place for it to happen.

**Engagement:** Our future leaders in raptor conservation stand among us today. Each class of young students that is introduced to life in an eagle nest or the beauty of a buteo moves us along in our goal of engaging and developing our future conservationists. It is so promising and exciting to watch and experience students learning through raptors in the classroom or in the banding blind. Whether it is watching the Decorah Eagles or holding and releasing a hawk, there is nothing more engaging or effective in developing a connection and love for nature. I'm proud of the success of our teachers, volunteers, and conservation partners. Thank you for supporting our programs, your interest, and your contribution to our future.

## TEACHER'S CORNER... Lori Carnes – 2nd Grade Teacher EDUCATION UPDATE



Lori Carnes

**The Raptor Resource Project continues to expand educational resources available to teachers and the public.** An RRP sister website, [www.raptorresource.education](http://www.raptorresource.education), was launched to provide environmentally-based, educator-created remote learning materials for students of all ages. Our teacher created lessons, crafts, and activities bring remote learning with Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, and the Mississippi River Driftless Area into classrooms and homes. Educators—including homeschoolers—can build on

lesson plans or share our interactive lessons and apps with their students via Google Classroom. We have 35 lessons right now, including 11 Google Classroom-ready lessons, and are continuing to add more.

I have been asked how I found the time to teach about bald eagles. I didn't teach eagles, I taught my curriculum using eagles. When I covered collective nouns, we talked about the examples I used in the lesson plan and learned about a communal roost, a convocation, and a kettle. The students added these vocabulary words to their eagle journals, along with a definition and sketch created by each student and a label for each part of speech (noun, verb, adjective). I also used the eagles to teach different types of writing. There were no reluctant writers when my students watched a video and formed their opinions about what they thought the eagles were thinking and doing! Using a high-interest topic like bald eagles leads to greater in-depth learning.

Teaching verbs.....

Mantle



Soar

Math



Weight

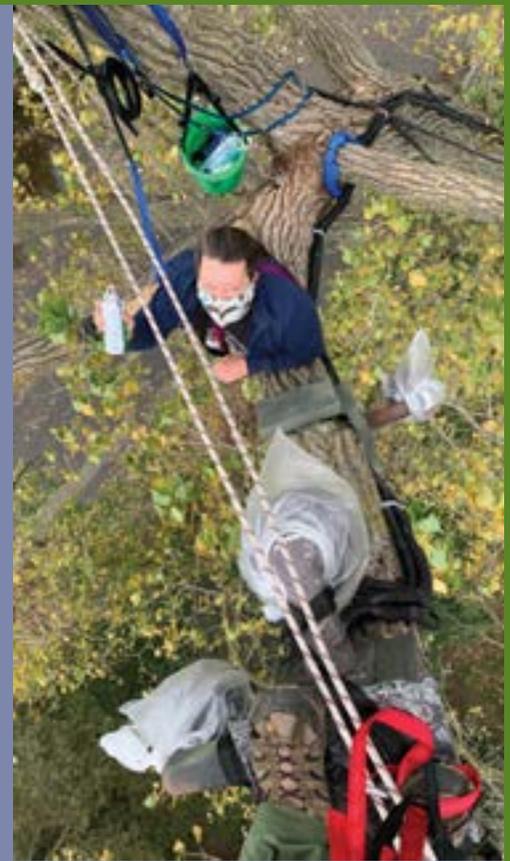
## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Camera Installation



John working on a camera.



Mike and Neil before climb.



Mike and Amy installing cameras.

**T**he Raptor Resource Project performs eagle cam installation, cleaning, and maintenance each year in September. This fall in Decorah, we replaced three cameras and two microphones at N2B and two cameras and one microphone at N1. At the North Nest, we installed one camera and two microphones. We also cleaned camera lenses we didn't replace, did some branch trimming in and around the nests, covered the camera cables in the area of the old nest at N1, worked with a videographer to collect footage for educational videos, and purchased a new computer for 4K nest cam video processing in Decorah. Why do we choose September for camera work? Our eagle couples are still on territory, but they aren't focused on their nests or young and travel away from the nest. That means we can work around the nest areas without disturbing them and driving them away. September affords us a narrow window to get everything done.

Replacing cameras requires at least a three-person team and months of preparation and planning. We research, purchase and program equipment, protect what feels like miles of cable, and purchase or assemble everything we think might be needed: tubing, conduit, electrical tape, paint, clamps, zip ties, silicone gel, screws, bits, hardware cloth, networking tools and supplies, carabiners, webbing, ropes, rope guns and so on. The list is easily as long as your arm and everything needs to be organized, sorted, and hauled down to command central before camera work starts. This year was special in that we also were challenged with lodging, dining, and working in close proximity during the pandemic! We implemented our COVID-19 protection plan while we completed our work.

Once we've got our ropes placed up in the nest tree—a saga in and of itself—the long days start. We climb up and down ropes, fix gear, haul up cameras, and troubleshoot problems as we go. How do we protect microphones from squirrels? What branches provide the best views of the nest? How do we install cameras with minimal impact to the eagles and their nest tree? How much wind is too much to work in? Are we descending to eat lunch or hauling lunch upstairs? How do we get this cable down the tree and secured? Why did this camera stop working? How does this camera angle look? A thousand questions and demands inform each day's work, and each day brings new challenges. We have about three weeks to get everything right.

What do Mom and Dad or Mr. North and DNF think about all of this? We can't ask them, but we can say that they don't appear to be bothered by it. Mom made a couple of distant fly-bys while we were working, but we didn't see the North eagles near the nest at all and both pairs of eagles returned to their nests shortly after our work was done. Careful timing and months of preparation ensure that we can complete our work before nest-building begins—typically in October.

In 2011, the Decorah Eagles kicked off a wildlife cam revolution that continues today. What started as an off-the-cuff offshoot of a film project (wouldn't it be fun if we put this online?) resulted in new, less invasive research methods and millions of people around the world watching wildlife they wouldn't have been able to see otherwise. Thank you so much for supporting our eagles and the work we do to bring them—and many other species—to you!

## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: Great River Energy



**Brenda Geisler with a banded falcon.**

**W**hen Great River Energy decided in September 2019 to close Elk River, Brenda Geisler, a 20-year Great River Energy employee and resident raptor expert, immediately started work on relocating the internet-famous nesting site. “A lot of co-ops are experiencing plant retirements and a lot have peregrine nests,” she says. “I’m hopeful moving this nest is a way to keep this a legacy for this plant and others.”

To find the right accommodations in time for the birds’ early 2020 return, Geisler assembled a 24-member team. After several meetings, the team decided to mount the nest box atop a 90-foot power pole stabilized by guywires. “Peregrine falcons prefer to nest hundreds of feet above the ground and near a reliable food source,” says John Howe, Executive Director of the Raptor Resource Project in Decorah, Iowa, and one of the wildlife specialists on the team. “Other than the turbine building [at Elk River Station], the highest facility structures at the site were only a couple stories high with employee traffic coming and going almost daily.

“Then Brenda shared an idea she had of using a large utility pole. We thought that just might work, since it was close by and a familiar area in the vicinity of their original nest box.”

Geisler designed a spacious box with perches outside every corner. Lightning protection was added to the pole, and a 3-foot wide sheet of metal was wrapped around its base to guard against racoon invasions. On January 30, three linemen raised the pole topped by the new nest box on a slope above a

Great River Energy pollinator garden of native flowers, grasses, and foliage. Down the hill is Interstate 10 and the Mississippi River, which the falcons use as a highway to travel south for the winter and back in spring.

Would peregrines adopt their new home? On March 3, the team got their answer when Breezy and Brooklyn, a

familiar falcon couple, appeared along the river. The sharp-eyed raptors spied the new nesting box high on a pole next to the now nearly demolished power plant. “I was wondering if they were going to accept the new nesting box and location, if it was going to be good enough,” Geisler says. “I felt a lot of relief when I saw them lay their first eggs.”

Great River Energy’s team had achieved a rare accomplishment in falcon conservation.

“We have successfully relocated peregrine falcon nest boxes before, but not using a free-standing pole,” says Amy Ries, who manages the peregrine falcon monitoring program for the Raptor Resource Project. “Great River Energy’s project was the first pole-mounted nest box relocation we are aware of, and we were very excited when Breezy and Brooklyn adopted it—and even more excited when they raised four healthy young this spring.”

“This project is significant, because it shows that peregrine falcons will occupy and nest in artificial nest box towers in the absence of natural cliffs or tall buildings,” Howe says. “The GRE Elk River facility has been a productive falcon nest site, and with the care and ingenuity of Brenda and the Great River Energy team, it will be for years to come.”

This story was written by Cathy Cash for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and is re-published by permission: [www.electric.coop](http://www.electric.coop). It ran in the December 2020 issue of RE Magazine: [www.cooperative.com/remagazine/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.cooperative.com/remagazine/Pages/default.aspx).



**Newly re-located nest box on pole.**



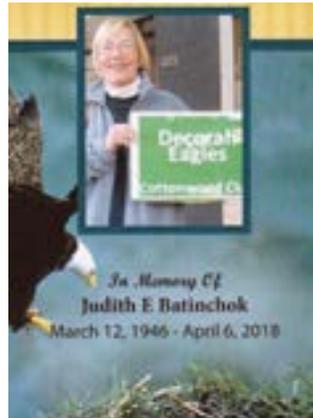
**Breezy with her young.**

## LEAVING A LEGACY...



**W**e are proud and honored to receive significant bequests along with many other individual gifts. Many devoted Decorah Eagles followers express in their own special way what a difference being able to watch “their eagles” has made in their lives. Whether it be a family or personal request to donate to RRP or a formal bequest, these thoughtful gifts have a profound impact on how we deliver on our mission. We are very thankful for donations to help us carry out what we do. What is a bequest? It is the act of giving or leaving something by will. A synonym is—Legacy. We are honored to share a little bit of information about two Decorah Eagle followers who wanted to make a difference:

**Judith Batinchok**, also known as GigglePup, was an avid Eagles watcher. She would watch daily as the eagles brought great joy to her daily routine, especially during her last few years. This donation (her bequest) was her way of saying “Thank You” for providing service to all the present and future eagle watchers out there. You can see from the attached photo and the smile on her face, that she was a proud member of the “Cottonwood Club”!



**Janice Bosworth** was an RRP Decorah Eagles Moderator and loved the eagles. Jan loved her role as a volunteer, working with her fellow Mods, and especially the chatters. She got along with everyone and was always greeted with love from the chatters. Her commitment was unwavering, and she is missed!

We are very honored that Judith and Janice chose to support the Raptor Resource Project in this way. We know from so many letters and accounts from Decorah Eagle followers that the excitement and joy of watching them raise their young and just “be eagles” is a motivational factor to get up every day. It is humbling to know that bringing the Decorah Eagles and our other raptors to the public can have such a lasting impact on people’s lives, friendships, and families. *If you are interested in leaving a lasting legacy, contact our planned giving representative and Board member Jeff Worrell (phone: 651-212-3026; email: [jeffw@raptorresource.org](mailto:jeffw@raptorresource.org)).*



## ROBERT ANDERSON MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP



**Bob at Minnesota Power's Clay Boswell Plant.**

**W**e have awarded scholarships—**\$1,500 each—to two Luther college students in the Environmental Studies program.** Our first scholarship recipient was awarded to Sean McKenzie in 2019. Our second recipient for 2020 is Piper Wood. It is exciting to see our second scholarship awarded with the knowledge that the fund balance is growing and in great shape with your generous contributions!

The Robert Anderson Memorial Scholarship Fund was created to honor Bob’s passion for raptors and to support local students on their way to environmental conservation careers. The Raptor Resource Project has partnered with the Winneshiek County Community Foundation and Luther College to deliver scholarships to selected Luther College students. Gifts are received through contributions, bequests, charitable trust remainders, and other gifts directed to the Fund. Students will be selected on criteria including demonstrated concern for the environment through positive environmental activism and community involvement or independent studies related to environmentalism. Donations are welcome! To make donations to the fund, contact the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa at 319-287-9106 or go to: [cfneia.org/robert-anderson-scholarship](http://cfneia.org/robert-anderson-scholarship)



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This newsletter was made possible by a generous grant from explore.org – Thank You!

We would like to thank our many partners...

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## SHOP OUR MERCHANDISE

Show your love for the Decorah Eagles, Decorah North Eagles, Mississippi Flyway, and Great Spirit Bluff—with our new mugs and Christmas ornaments at: [www.zazzle.com/store/rrp\\_gifts\\_and\\_more](http://www.zazzle.com/store/rrp_gifts_and_more) or go to our website and click 'Shop' at top right, next to **Donate and Subscribe**. In addition to RRP-created products, a fan, Sunset Dreamer, created beautiful mugs, ornaments, and notecards. All proceeds go to benefit the Raptor Resource Project. We also plan to have Decorah, Decorah North, and Flyway calendars available by November 23. Watch our website and Facebook page for more details!

