

2013 Raptor Resource Banding Report



16/U at Xcel Energy's Blackdog Plant. Photo courtesy Daniel Meyer.

Raptor Resource Project 2013 Banding Report

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Raptor Resource Project
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Productive Falcon Nest Sites

05/30/13: Alliant Energy, Cassville, WI	6
06/04/13: Red Wing Grain, Red Wing, MN	6
06/04/13: Horizon Milling, Lake City, MN	7
06/06/13: 3M, Cottage Grove, MN	7
06/06/13: Diamond Bluff, Diamond Bluff, WI	8
06/08/13: Maiden Rock, Maiden Rock, WI	9
06/08/13: Maassen's Bluff, Nelson, WI	9
06/10/13: Great Spirit Bluff, Dresbach, MN	10
06/10/13: Bunge America, McGregor, Iowa	11
06/12/13: Xcel Energy Blackdog, Eagan MN	11
06/12/13: Xcel Energy Sherco, Becker, MN	12
06/13/13: Xcel Energy Prairie Island, Prairie Island, MN	13
06/14/13: Dairyland Power Alma, Alma WI	14
06/18/13: Minnesota Power's Clay Boswell Energy Center, Cohasset, MN	15
06/18/13: Greysolon Plaza, Duluth, MN	15
06/19/13: West Bluff, West Bluff, WI.....	16
06/20/13: Xcel Energy Monticello Plant, Monticello, MN	18
06/20/13: Great River Energy, Elk River, MN	19
06/28/2013: Minnesota Power's Hibbard Energy Center, Duluth, MN	20
06/24/2013: Aggie's Bluff, Lansing, IA	20

Unproductive Sites and Sightings

Xcel Energy Allen S. King Plant, Oak Park Heights, MN	21
Dairyland Power Genoa, Genoa, WI.....	21
Bay State Milling, Winona, MN	21
US Bank, LaCrosse, WI	21
Alliant Lansing Bluff, Lansing, IA.....	21
Homer Bluff, Homer MN	21
Shellhorn Bluff, Brownsville, MN.....	22
Noble's Island, Harper's Ferry, IA	22
Sightings	22

Eagles, Vultures, Owls, and Kestrels

Decorah Bald Eagles	23
Fort St. Vrain Bald Eagles.....	23
Marshall, Missouri Turkey Vultures.....	24
Valmont Owls	24
Pawnee Kestrels	24
Kestrel Nestbox Project	25

2013 Raptor Resource Banding Report

What a year! 2013 saw the expansion of our bird cam program into the Philippines, the addition of new cams and equipment at Eaglecrest, the first test of our pilot American kestrel program, the unexpected adoption of a new nest by the Decorah bald eagles, the abandonment of the Missouri turkey vulture nest by its resident birds following the destruction of their single egg by a third turkey vulture, and the claiming of several territories by immature birds (although most of them were eventually displaced). We monitored over 45 peregrine falcon sites, eventually banding 53 young falcons at 19 of them. Once again, the falcons at Aggie's bluff fledged before we could band them, yielding a total of 56 young produced at 20 sites.

If there was a theme in 2013, it was bad weather! From Cohasset, Minnesota down through Platteville, Colorado, we watched falcons, bald eagles, and owls incubating eggs in heavy snow and seemingly constant rain. Two of our most productive sites – the Allen S. King plant in Oak Park Heights and Dairyland Power's Genoa site – failed to produce any young, as did Bay State Milling in Winona, Minnesota. Last year, the female there laid and hatched five eggs, raising all of the young to fledge. She laid five eggs again this year, but none of them hatched. The Valmont Owl nest failed completely, and the Fort St. Vrain eagles lost two of three hatched young following heavy, wet snow.

We also saw reduced production at our successful boxes. In some cases, eggs failed to hatch, while in others young hatched but died or fell victim to insects. In June of 2013, Bob watched in horror as the young falcons at Great Spirit Bluff scratched and twitched desperately to shake off black flies before jumping out into space. The roughly 30-day old falcons still had undeveloped flight and tail feathers and were nowhere near fledging age. He said *"It made me feel sick to my stomach to see the last falcon step off into the air. I believed it was jumping to certain death."*

After the last falcon jumped, we searched the talus slope below the box. We were able to find one unharmed young falcon, which we fostered to the Red Wing Grain nest box. We were surprised that even one had survived, but we assumed it must have hit branches or other foliage, which broke its fall before it hit the ground. We were even more surprised a week or so later, when two more young falcons turned up on cam. Their parents must have entered the thick underbrush below the bluff to find and feed them. Falcons weren't the only species of birds to succumb to the black fly plague this spring: at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin, adult whooping cranes deserted 17 of 20 nests following a black fly hatch.

We know that cool, wet springs are linked to unusually low reproductive success. Cold weather, reduced prey abundance, and difficulty hunting have all been cited as possible causes. Could large insect hatches be yet another factor? We talk about mortality caused by cats, wires, electrocution, and many other things, but how many birds succumb to the black fly and other insect parasites? Bob wonders just how much this tiny biting insect affects the breeding and survivability of species within its range.

Bob continues to find the behavior of cliff-nesting falcons interesting. Their territories seem much more fluid than those of urban falcons. We watched three territories this spring where falcons drifted between cliffs within a small area, and the falcons at Diamond Bluff, Dairyland Power, and Alliant Lansing sometimes choose nest boxes and sometimes choose cliffs. Is their territoriality spread across a wider area, or is it simply the plethora of nesting space that cliffs present? Many urban falcons seem to have a laser focus on their nest boxes that cliff-nesting falcons lack.

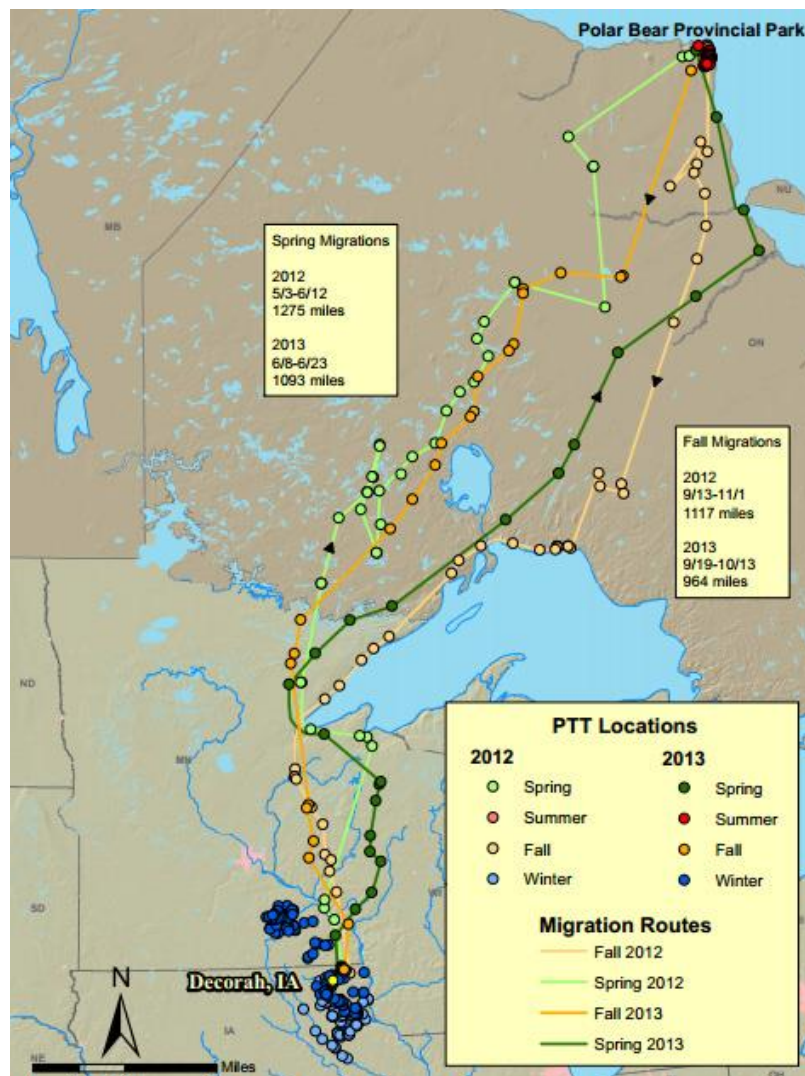
Despite our reduced numbers, not all of the news was bad. Our pilot kestrel project was very successful, with three of four nest boxes producing young. Aggie's bluff produced falcons for the second year in a row and falcons finally came back to Maassen's bluff after an absence of six years. Falcons produced young at Diamond Bluff, Red Wing Grain, and Prairie Island – something we thought wouldn't happen given the close proximity of

2013 Raptor Resource Banding Report

the three sites. Three of the four falcons that jumped at Great Spirit Bluff survived until fledge – we augmented one to the box at Red Wing Grain, while the others were fed and cared for by their parents in the brush beneath the bluff. Still, we hope it is many years before we see another spring like this.

With all of the failures, it was nice to see the Decorah eagles successfully raise and fledge three young from their new nest. We found it quite funny that the young eagles returned to the old nest shortly after fledge. The old nest was larger and located in an area with fewer branches. This probably made fly-ins and outs easier for the newly flighted young.

Speaking of the Decorah bald eagles, D1 spent another summer in Polar Bear Park, on Hudson Bay in Ontario. She appears to have learned from last year's journey home, since her northward migration this year greatly resembled her southward migration last year. The map below shows how similar her journeys are. Her original northward migration in the spring of 2012 took a considerably longer path and occurred earlier – probably because of 2012's warm weather. She is back in Decorah now. What will she do this winter? Will she go to Canada again next spring? We can hardly wait to find out!



D1's fall 2012 and spring 2013 migrations.

2013 Raptor Resource Banding Report

Although banding season is over, our work isn't done. We are working with the Philippine Eagle Foundation to get their cam back online, and with Neil Rettig to make a full-length documentary about the Philippine Eagle. Bob is also consulting with photographer Jim Brandenburg on a falcon cam at the Mont St. Michel castle in northern France, and all of us are looking for ways to expand our kestrel program following the pilot's success this spring. We look forward to 2014! For more banding pics, follow this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.558247797545177.1073741838.103786266324668&type=3>

Acknowledgements

We wrote the Raptor Resource Project's 2013 Banding Report to provide formal banding data for collection and study and to share our observations with our members and friends. I would like to thank the many people who helped us this year by humping heavy, awkward gear up bluffs, identifying falcons, tracking hatch dates, emailing pictures and observations, helping with banding, and gifting us with donations. You are a crucial part of what we do. Many thanks to our forum members and the people who capture and post video to YouTube. Your postings, comments, and contacts document behavior at our nests and help us maintain an increasingly complicated calendar. You are very helpful in our efforts to monitor nests and babies, for which we are deeply grateful.

The Ustream and Facebook mods are a vitally important part of the Raptor Resource Project. They volunteer long hours and are an invaluable source of information and inspiration for millions. Thank you so much for your hard work, knowledge, and experience. We are deeply grateful for the best moderating teams around! A special shout-out to Thinking Woman and RRMod, our leads on Ustream and Facebook, for their wonderful, dedicated service. The cams would not be what they are without your dedicated service.

This year, we welcomed back Gary Grunwald, the entire Howe family, Brenda Geisler, Brett Mandernack, Ryan Schmitz, Nora Hensley, John Dingley, Pat Schlarbaum, Helen Harvey, Ray Renn, and Miriam and Ed Burke. New friends include Gary Wolfe, Joe Krumrie, and Rebecca Dick from the Wisconsin DNR, property manager Dani Anderson from Greysolon Plaza, Katie Swanson from Hawk Ridge, Brett's new assistant Jason Thiele, Fred and Laverne from Hawaii (thank you for your support!), and the landowners at Aggie's Bluff. A big thanks is due to the technical support staff at Ustream and Simms Electronics in Decorah, especially Joanna Dorfman and Chris Brey from Ustream, and Kenny from Sims Electric. We want to give a huge shoutout to Jim Womeldorf and Charlie Foreman for their help. Jim was able to get video of life in the new nest, and both men have been absolutely critical in helping with all facets of camera installation and operation. Thanks also to John and Susan Howe and Chuck Hird and John Carton for their work at the Great Spirit Bluff and Turkey Vulture cams, and to Brett and Jason for the D1 maps.

Power plants, stackhouses, and other industrial sites have been crucial to the recovery of the peregrine falcon. We really appreciate the staff that help us get it all done, including Paul Lassance, Alvin Bontreger, Jim Larson, Dean Pagel, Chuck Bremer, Roger, Wayne, Mike McShane, Jim Fuchs, Paul Gerbec, Regina Minary, Mike Long, Dan Meyer, Brian Schmidt, Kristi Albrecht, Isaac Fuhr, Frank Sperlak, Brittany Brenner, Brad Foss, Nathan Helder, Doug Braff, Harper Harkin, and Brenda Geisler. You guys help us monitor and band falcons at sites throughout Minnesota, Iowa, and Western Wisconsin, and we couldn't do it without you! We miss Dan Orr and John Thiel, but it has been wonderful working with Brian and Brad. We are already looking forward to next spring!

Our climbing team this year was comprised of Bob Anderson, Dave Kester, Amy Ries, Neil Rettig, John Howe, and Ben Ogren. Many thanks to everyone for their hard work and dedication. We'll see you next year!

2013 Productive Nest Sites

05/30/13: Alliant Energy, Cassville, WI

Adult Data

Adult female: Milly R/89, a 2009 Horizon Milling Lake City hatch

Adult male: unknown

Nesting Data

4 eggs laid | 3 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 05/06/13

- Male | 1126-14380 | E/17 | Hawkeye
- Male | 1126-14381 | E/18 | Samuel
- Female | 1947-18972 | B/23 | Jewel

Brett Mandernack, Ryan Schmidt, Alvin Bontreger, and Paul Lassance went up the stack to band the falcons. Plant employee Paul Lassance, a real falcon fan, noted:

The photo is one I took shortly after they hatched out. You can see the nest camera at the top of the box. Nelson Dewey frequently checks the box camera on our internal plant network when the eggs are laid thru to the young in the nest box. Even after seeing them year after year, we still look forward to the new hatch every spring.



Year falcons first nested here: 2001 | Total number of young produced: 38

06/04/13: Red Wing Grain, Red Wing, MN

Adult Data

Adult female: Laura R/83, a 2009 Great Spirit Bluff hatch

Adult male: unbanded

Nesting Data

4 eggs laid | 4 eggs hatched | 2 young died shortly after hatching

Hatch date: 05/17/13

- Female | 1947-18974 | B/24 | Phoebe
- Female | 1947-18973 | B/25 | Snowball

It was an interesting year at Red Wing Grain. Initially, things started out quite straightforwardly – the falcons laid 4 eggs beginning on April 8 and the eggs began hatching on May 17. All four hatched in close proximity. The young falcons appeared healthy and were eating well, but two of them died on May 24.



Manager Jim Larson with a newly banded falcon.

The remaining two falcons seemed healthy and developed with no problems. On June 4th, Bob, Amy, and Red Wing Grain manager Jim Larson visited Twin Bluffs Middle School in Red Wing to talk to Mrs. Carlson's 5th

2013 Productive Nest Sites

grade class. The children asked a lot of questions and gave us the names they selected for the two survivors. We banded the falcons afterwards and thought we'd seen the last of Red Wing Grain in 2013 until the young falcons at Great Spirit Bluff stampeded out of their box. A search of the talus slope below the bluff yielded male Stolt, who was augmented to the Red Wing Grain box on June 18th. Bob chose Red Wing Grain because the falcons were very similar in age. Stolt quickly integrated into his new family and all three falcons fledged successfully. A big thanks to Jim Larson and Red Wing Grain. You are wonderful falcon friends and supporters!

Year falcons first nested here: 2000 | Total number of young produced: 33

06/04/13: Horizon Milling, Lake City, MN

Adult Data

Adult female: Charlette *Y/*P, a 2008 Wells Fargo Bank Bloomington MN hatch

Adult male: unknown, banded black/green left

Nesting Data

Unknown number of eggs laid | 3 eggs hatched

Hatch date (estimated): 05/15/13

- Female | 1947-18975 | B/26 | Sandy
- Female | 1947-18976 | B/27 | Sarah
- Male | 1126-14382 | E/19 | Wayne

Roger and Wayne accompanied Bob and Amy to the roof, where we banded three healthy young falcons. We really appreciate their time and dedication – they are wonderful falcon friends!

Year falcons first nested here: 2002 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 41



Bob, Roger, and Wayne banding a young falcon.

06/06/13: 3M, Cottage Grove, MN

Adult Data

Adult female: unknown

Adult male: Charlie 64/P, a 2003 hatch from Horizon Milling, Lake City MN

Nesting Data

4 eggs laid | 2 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 5/16/13

- Female | 1947-18977 | B/28 | Bonney
- Female | 1947-18978 | B/29 | DMG

This is a fun site to band. The nestbox, which Rob, Amy, and Bob installed in the fall of 2006, is located on a plant water tower. To access it, we climb a ladder in a chute that goes through the water catchment. We emerge 150 feet in the



Bob handing a young falcon over the box. The water-tower rolls off quite steeply, so he is double-tied off for safety and additional security.

2013 Productive Nest Sites

air, in a lovely spot overlooking the Mississippi river. It becomes immediately apparent why falcons nest here once you've visited the box.

The young falcons were healthy and a nice age to band – old enough to easily sex, but not too feisty. A big thanks to 3M for keeping such wonderful track of the falcons, and to Vernon Hoppe for climbing the tower with us. This site can be done by two people, but three people make it easier and much safer for the falcons and their banders.

Year falcons first nested here: 2008 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 18

06/06/13: Diamond Bluff, Diamond Bluff, WI

Adult Data

Adults unknown

Nesting Data

Number of eggs laid: Unknown | 2 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 5/19/13 (estimated)

- Female | 1947-18979 | B/30 | Sita
- Male | 1156-14901 | E/20 | Trotter

Bob, Rob Macintyre, and several friends installed a nest box here over 20 years ago. It sat empty until 2011, when falcons nested here but not at Red Wing Grain. In 2012, falcons nested at Red Wing Grain but not at Diamond Bluff. In 2013, falcons nested in both places, although the pair at Diamond Bluff chose a pothole instead of the nest box. We were fairly certain there were young here but had no idea how old they were. We rappelled in on 6/6/13 to find out.



Amy's helmet is the blue dot on the bottom right of the page

Bob and Amy drove to the top of the cliff. Amy rigged around Bob's bumper and descended with a banding bag. While Bob was getting ready for his own descent, a feral goat showed up and tried to chew Amy's rope. When Bob tried to shoo the goat away, it attacked him, rearing up on its hind legs and lashing out with its front hooves. In Bob's own words:

We tied off the climbing rope to the bumper hitch of my car and Amy went down the wall to band the young falcons. After a few minutes a wild goat appeared out of nowhere and was determined to chew on the climbing rope. It took constant attention on my part to keep the goat from gnawing on Amy's life line. I was more than relieved when Amy returned to the cliff top. In retrospect I shudder to think what would have happened if both of us were on rope on the cliff wall. I can envision the headline: 'Raptor Experts killed by Goat'!

Amy was blissfully unaware of the commotion above. She banded two young falcons 17 or 18 days of age. The large ledge made it easy to band on the cliff face.

Year falcons first nested here: 2011 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 4

2013 Productive Nest Sites

06/08/13: Maiden Rock, Maiden Rock, WI

Adult Data

Adults unknown

Nesting Data

Number of eggs laid: unknown | 3 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 5/19/13 (estimated)

- Female | 1947-18980 | B/31 | Oahu
- Female | 1947-18981 | B/32 | Laverne
- Male | 1156-14902 | E/22 | Fred

Amy and Dave Kester rappelled down and banded the falcons on the cliff. There is a ledge to the right or downstream side of the eyrie just wide enough to sit on, although getting there takes a little work. All of the young falcons looked healthy, and B/31 had the fattest legs we've ever encountered. The female band was just big enough to fit her.



Since neither Dave nor Amy took photos, we've included a picture of Bob from 2001, the first year falcons nested here. They've nested in a number of places on 'The Matriarch' but in 2013 moved back to eyrie number one.

Year falcons first nested here: 2001 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 28

06/08/13: Maassen's Bluff, Nelson, WI

Adult Data

Adult female is banded black/red

Nesting Data

Number of eggs laid: unknown | 2 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 5/16/13 (estimated)

- Female | 1947-18982 | B/33 | Stephanie
- Female | 1947-18983 | B/34 | Christy

Finally! Falcons haven't nested at Maassen's Bluff since 2007. We were all thrilled to see them back here in 2013 – especially Gary Grunwald, who owns a house below the cliff and watches it daily. The cliff is quite large and falcons have nested in a number of places. We were relieved that they chose a pothole we improved with pea gravel back in 2003. The gravel provides drainage and protection for the eggs and has had better production than other places they've nested or attempted to nest.

We drove up the back of the cliff. Dave rappelled down and retrieved the two young falcons, whom Gary named after his daughters. Dave and Amy returned them, since Amy ended up having to drop over when the box ended up on a ledge. It was nice to be back on Maassen's bluff again!

First year falcons nested here: 2001 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 14

2013 Productive Nest Sites

06/10/13: Great Spirit Bluff, Dresbach, MN

Adult Data

Adult female: Michelle P/87, a 2005 hatch from Maassen's Bluff, Nelson WI

Adult male: Travis 06/N, a 2003 hatch from Lee's Bluff, Lynxville, WI

Nesting Data

Number of eggs laid: 4 | 4 hatched

Hatch date: 5/17/13

- Female | 1947-18984 | B/35 | Mandy
- Female | 1947-18985 | B/36 | Toni
- Male | 1156-14903 | E/23 | Stolt
- Male | 1156-14904 | E/24 | Jonathan

The banding at Great Spirit Bluff was quite uneventful. Amy trained John Howe earlier this year, and he and Dave Kester rappelled down to the nest box, retrieving four healthy young falcons who were named after John's son Jonathan and some friends of the family.

Once the banding was over, we figured we wouldn't be back until next year. However, on June 17, all four young falcons were stampeded from the box by insects. They were around 30 days old at the time, and we watched in horror as one after another jumped to what we thought must have been certain death. Bob headed over to GSB to rappel to the box while George Howe rounded up a search party and another climber. The last young falcon was out on the perch, so he wasn't able to rappel over. In Bob's words:

While the family that owns GSB searched the underbrush below the cliff, we rigged our ropes to descend and treat the nest box with bug repellent. However, the last eyas was perched out front of the nest box and I did not want to bump it into premature flight. We all watched the young falcon on the live monitor as it twitched to shake off bugs, hoping that it would jump back into the nest box. Much to our shock, it too stepped off into the air. I can't express how upsetting it was to see these 30-day old falcons jump. The owner of the cliff was able to find and rescue one young male falcon that was not injured.

After the last falcon made its premature flight, we noted that all of the flies disappeared as well. I had to make a hard call shot. I could not justify putting the eyas back in the cliff-mounted nest box only to watch it jump again. I decided to augment the surviving eyas to a nest box upstream in Red Wing that had two eyases of the same age.

Bob kept the young falcon overnight in his mews and we all met at Red Wing the next day. Dave and Amy put Stolt in the box with half a dead quail. Two hours later, mother Laura, a 2009 hatch from Great Spirit Bluff, was feeding the newcomer. Meanwhile, it appeared the two adult falcons at Great Spirit Bluff might be feeding young falcons. Our suspicions were verified on June 25 when a juvenile appeared on camera. We eventually identified Mandy and Jonathan. To our amazement, three of the four falcons that jumped survived and their parents managed to find and care for two of them in the thick underbrush below the cliff.

We haven't seen anything like this before and hope never to see it again. Perhaps the unusually wet, late spring triggered a larger hatch of insects than usual, or hatch timing was late enough that bugs became a problem.

Year falcons first nested here: 2005 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 30



John Howe visits the nest box

2013 Productive Nest Sites

06/10/13: Bunge America, McGregor, Iowa

Adult Data

Adult female: *U/*R Bubbles, a 2009 3M hatch

Adult male: something/S, black over green

Nesting Data

Unknown number of eggs laid | 2 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 5/17/13 (estimated)

- Female | 1947-18986 | B/37 | Stella
- Male | 1156-14905 | E/25 | Chuck

Bunge North America installed one of Jonathan's nest boxes here two years ago. The nest boxes have a panel that slides forward when the box is tipped up, blocking access from the front. It is a great design that makes banding safer for falcons and humans. Well, somewhat safer. Young Stella, seen in the photo at right, was extremely feisty and got Dave underneath a fingernail. Regina Minary and a few other staff picked out names inspired by Angry Birds – very appropriate in this case.

Year falcons first nested here: 2010 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 8



Dave Kester and Stella. The blood is his.

06/12/13: Xcel Energy Blackdog, Eagan MN

Adult Data

Adult female: 16/U Frannie, a 2011 St Cloud Correctional Facility hatch

Adult male: unknown, but we believe he is new

Nesting Data

4 eggs laid | 3 eggs hatched | 2 young died

Hatch date: 5/22/13

- Male | 1156-14909 | E/29 | Buggy

Another interesting site. From a blog post on Monday, June 3rd:

On May 22, 2013, the falcon eggs at Xcel Energy's Blackdog nest box began hatching. Immature female 16/U laid four eggs and hatched three. Although both parents diligently cared for their young, they never seemed to thrive. On May 27th, a watcher reported strange black patches on one of the young. By May 31, two of the three young were dead. We don't know how the first one was disposed of, but the parents fed the second young to the third.

In watching the box, we noticed the strange black patches. We also saw that the remaining baby didn't seem to be developing properly. It was quite small for ten days of age, spent more time under its mother than might be expected, and didn't seem to be developing feathers properly. Perhaps the young falcon



Buggy's back and neck on visit one.

2013 Productive Nest Sites

had Frounce, an infection with growths of the digestive tract that interferes with food intake. We decided to go up the stack and treat it with Spartrix. This has been a very hard year on our falcons and we really didn't want to lose any more.

I called Dan, our contact at the plant, and made the necessary arrangements. The Blackdog nest isn't especially easy to get to, since it is at the 600' level of the plant's smokestack. An elevator takes you to the 300' level and ladders take you the rest of the way. All told, you need to plan on a minimum of 50 minutes to visit the box. A big thanks to Dan for taking the time out of his day!

I was really shocked when we finally got to the nest. The falcon was very small, coated with black gunk, and swarming with Hippoboscid flies. They were on its back, belly, under wings, and neck. We thought the black gunk might be prey remains, but it was actually scabs, dried blood, and damaged feathers. The parasites were feeding by chewing soft areas of skin, causing an area of localized bleeding from which they drank.

Dan held the falcon while I cleaned it off. The parasites caused extensive damage, destroying feathers, interfering with feather growth, and delaying development. I killed and swabbed and crushed and killed and swabbed and crushed again. Once the parasites seemed to be (mostly) dead, I checked the box, took a few bits out, and returned the baby falcon, along with a dead quail. Mom was back in the box before we were back in the stack, and the quail was gone by the time we reached the bottom. Despite the damage, the young falcon had a good crop and even seemed somewhat feisty, weakly footing with tiny talons.

The young falcon survived the damage and was quite healthy, albeit a little smaller than I expected, when we returned to band on 6/12/13. Dan caught photos of Buggy perched on a nearby building on July 10th, fully recovered and already fledged. It is worth noting that this falcon had a full – and I mean bulging – crop both times Dan and Amy visited.



Buggy's back on visit two

Year falcons first nested here: 1993 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 56

06/12/13: Xcel Energy Sherco, Becker, MN

Adult Data

Adults unknown

Nesting Data

4 eggs laid | 4 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 5/22/13

- Male | E/26 | 1156-14906 | Jet
- Male | E/27 | 1156-14907 | Flame
- Male | E/28 | 1156-14908 | Rocky
- Female | A/30 | 1947-18987 | Oreo

2013 Productive Nest Sites

It was a wet and rainy day for banding. Amy, Brian Schmidt, Isaac Fuhr, and Kristy Albrecht were met by an excited group of fourth-graders from Becker Elementary School. The children, who had been following the falcons online, asked great questions and shared their observations. They were thrilled to see Brian and Isaac retrieve the young falcons while the adults swooped and dove at them, and loved the opportunity to see the birds up close.

We banded quickly, putting each falcon back in a loosely covered cardboard box to protect them from the rain. Once we were done, the children chose names and Brian and Isaac quickly returned the young birds back to the nest box. A big thanks to David Hannula from the Sherburne County Citizen for the photo.

Year falcons first nested here: 1992 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 58



Amy and Brian banding a young falcon in the rain

06/13/13: Xcel Energy Prairie Island, Prairie Island, MN

Adult Data

Adult female: unknown

Adult male: unknown

Nesting Data

Unknown number of eggs laid | 3 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 5/19/31 (estimated)

- Male | 1126-14135 | 09/M | Shad
- Female | 1947-18965 | B/16 | Merve
- Female | 1947-18966 | B/17 | Dace

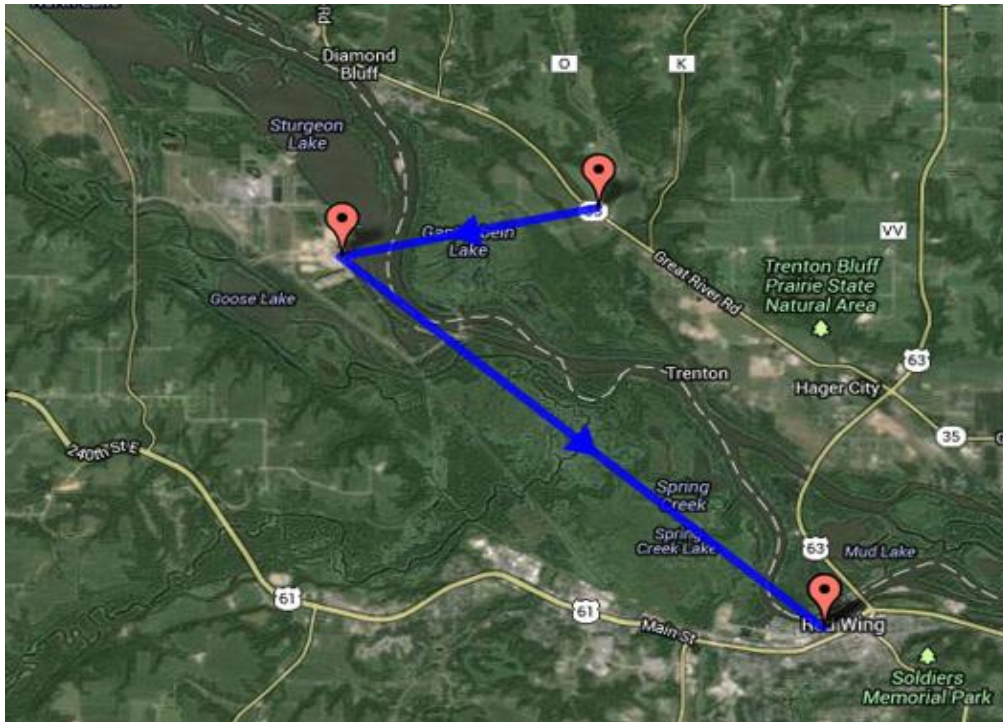
Brian Schmidt, Frank Sperlak, and Brittany Brenner banded three healthy young falcons at Prairie Island. This site is 2.4 miles southwest of Diamond Bluff – you can see Diamond Bluff from the top of the dome – and 5.9 miles northwest of Red Wing Grain. Since Diamond Bluff was empty last year, we thought that falcons might not nest at Diamond when they nested at PI or Red Wing Grain. We were happy to have falcons produced at all three locations!

Here is a map with the shortest distances marked. Note that Red Wing Grain and Diamond Bluff are 4.8 miles apart. Although this triplet is close together, it is not our closest pair.



Brittany with a young falcon. The grey area on its chest is a bulging crop.

2013 Productive Nest Sites



Map showing sites at Diamond Bluff, Prairie Island, and Red Wing Grain

Year falcons first nested here: 1997 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 49

06/14/13: Dairyland Power Alma, Alma WI

Adult Data

Adult female: 21/V Hedweg, a 2011 WPS hatch from the Weston power plant

Adult male: C/97 Kiwi, a 2006 hatch from the Xcel Energy King plant in Oak Park Heights, MN

Nesting Data

4 eggs laid | 4 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 5/23/13

- Female | 1947-18988 | B/38 | Wolf
- Female | 1947-18989 | B/39 | Rebecca
- Female | 1947-18990 | B/40 | Kristen
- Male | 1156-14909 | E/30 | Mac

Falcons have nested at Alma since 1997. Along with Prairie Island, this was one of our first Mississippi utility sites. The falcons here bounce back and forth between the stack and cliff located immediately behind it. The nestbox on the stack is mounted to a light port and has a special top that flips off to block off the entrance when the box is opened – one of Bob's first flip-top designs.

Last year's resident falcons Alex and Speedy were both replaced this year, although we don't know whether they failed to come back or were defeated in a territorial battle. We thought Hedweg and Kiwi might choose the cliff but, like Alex and Speedy, they chose the stack. Bob was joined for banding by Dairyland employees and WI



Young falcons. The elevator here is too small for the kennel, so we use a box

2013 Productive Nest Sites

DNR staff Gary Wolf and Rebecca Dick. Gary went up the stack with Brad Foss to retrieve the falcons, and Gary, Rebecca, and Brad helped band.

A big thank you to Dairyland Power and Brad Foss for their support of the falcons. This site has been highly productive and is one of a handful of sites that have reached the 60-falcon production mark.

Year falcons first nested here: 1997 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 60

06/18/13: Minnesota Power's Clay Boswell Energy Center, Cohasset, MN

Adult Data

Adult female: unbanded

Adult male: unknown

Nesting Data

4 eggs laid | 4 eggs hatched

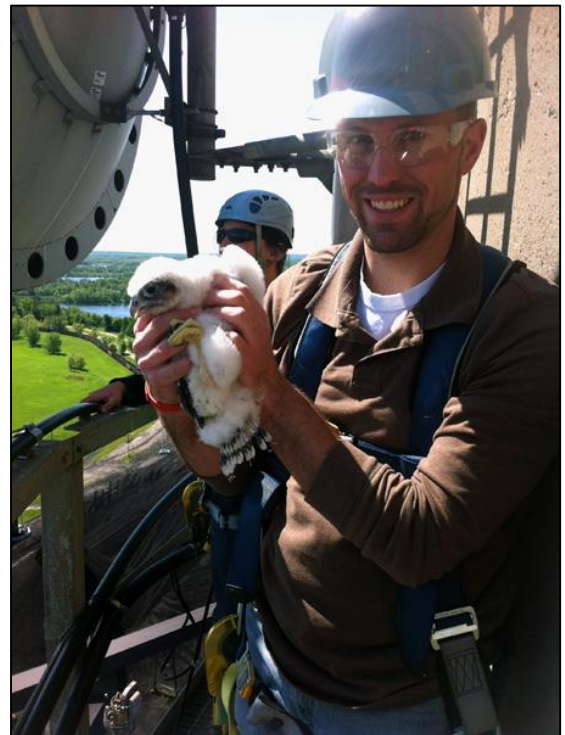
Hatch date: 5/27/13

- Female | 1947-18991 | A/31 | Nat
- Female | 1947-18982 | A/32 | Harper
- Male | 1156-14911 | E/31 | ToolesboroTom
- Male | 1156-14912 | E/32 | Braff

Cohasset is our northernmost site, and it is considerably closer to Amy than anyone else. Amy, Doug Braff, and Nathan Helder climbed the stack to band four healthy young falcons. The nest box here is located about 200' up and is one of our very early power plant sites. It was installed in 1992 by a team that included Minnesota Power employee and falconer Darryl Councilman. Darryl watches the box very closely and has maintained excellent records since falcons first started nesting here in 1993. It was great to see him this year.

We band behind the communications dish on this stack, which provides some shelter from the wind and helps protect banders from aggressive adults. Wind and adult aggression are often factors in selecting a catwalk-based banding location.

Year falcons first nested here: 1993 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 64



MPL employee Nathan Helder holds up a young falcon for banding.

06/18/13: Greysolon Plaza, Duluth, MN

Adult Data

Adult female: *B/8, a 2004 hatch from Mount McRae, Ontario

Adult Male: unknown

Nesting Data

4 eggs laid | 3 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 4/29/13

- Female | 1947-18993 | A/33 | Faith
- Female | 1947-18984 | A/34 | Dani

2013 Productive Nest Sites

- Male | 1156-14913 | E/33 | Roger

After Cohasset, Amy went to the Greysolon Plaza, where she was joined by current property manager Dani Anderson, building supervisor Roger, former property managers Miriam and Ed Burke, Hawk Ridge staffer Katie Swanson, and two young boys who were guests of Miriam and Ed. While most of the crew waited in a safe place on the building's roof, Amy and Katie went to retrieve the falcons.

The female here is very aggressive and the tie-off requires a window washing rig. Ed expertly steered it into place. Amy set up anchors for herself and Katie. Because the female attacks as soon as you are on the rig, she's learned to set everything up on the bottom. It is hard to rig and safety check when a falcon is attacking. While Katie protected her with a broom, Amy went over the wall. What is it with these falcons in Duluth?! Katie did a top-notch job, although at one point *B/8 perched behind Amy, jumped up, and footed her arm. That is why we wear hoodies here, although light chain mail might work better!

The young falcons were healthy and the children really enjoyed a chance to see them up close. Thanks so much to Dani for her wonderful support, to Katie for her assistance, and to Miriam and Ed for their ongoing advocacy of the falcons. It was great to see everyone.



Dani with a young falcon.



The boys and Katie.



Over the edge. Lake Superior in background.

Year falcons first nested here: 2003 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 33

06/19/13: West Bluff, West Bluff, WI

Adult Data

Adult female: unknown

Adult Male: unknown

Nesting Data

Unknown number of eggs laid | 4 hatched

Hatch date: 5/28/13 (estimated)

- Female | 1947-18985 | A/35 | Sandi
- Female | 1947-18986 | A/36 | Marcelle

2013 Productive Nest Sites

- Female | 1947-18987 | A/37 | Abbey
- Female | 1947-18988 | A/38 | Mahalia

West was fun! We were joined by a film crew from Al Jazeera, who were filming a show about the Mississippi river and wanted a segment on falcons. Marcelle Hopkins and her staff Greg and Murad filmed us at West Bluff above and below the cliff. We were also joined by WI DNR Wildlife Technician Gary Wolf and Joe Krumrie, a member of his staff, property owners Don and Sandy Hovde, and several neighbors who wanted to make sure nothing strange was going on at the Broughton's property, and our friend Gary Grunwald from Maassen's bluff. Dan and Sheila Broughton were unable to make the banding this year, although they arranged for us to band on the neighbor's property. We hope to see them next year. A big thanks to Don and Sandy for allowing us access. It was fun to meet everyone.

Ben and Dave climbed in while Amy handled the box on top. This is an extremely difficult location to reach and we are thinking about putting in an anchor to make things a little easier once you finally get there. They got the falcons, Amy hauled them up, and Bob and a WI DNR employee banded them. We were all a little worried about getting the falcons back, since there is a serious overhang here and even a tag line on the kennel doesn't help much. We ended up carabinering the tag line to Dave's rope and sending it directly down. This worked wonderfully, although we might want to deploy different colored ropes for the climbers and kennel to make immediate identification a little easier.

West Bluff and Maiden Rock are probably our two closest occupied sites in terms of proximity. The two sites are roughly 1.9 miles apart, although one can't be seen from the other. We haven't yet seen falcons nest at both Castle Rock and Bay State Milling, which are 1.8 miles apart. Since one can be very clearly seen from the other, it will be interesting to see if falcons ever adopt both at the same time. Some shots from the helmet cam:



2013 Productive Nest Sites



Year falcons first nested here: 2005 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 21

06/20/13: Xcel Energy Monticello Plant, Monticello, MN

Adult Data

Adult female: unknown

Adult Male: unknown

Nesting Data

4 eggs laid | 4 eggs hatched | 1 young died

Hatch date: 5/25/13

- Female | 1947-18967 | B/18 | Spring
- Female | 1947-18968 | B/19 | Summer
- Male | 1126-14374 | 91/N | Winter

The falcons at Monticello are located on the off-gas stack, which requires a 300-foot ladder climb up the outside to reach the nest. This year Brian Schmidt made the climb, banding three young falcons.

Year falcons first nested here: 1995 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 52

2013 Productive Nest Sites

06/20/13: Great River Energy, Elk River, MN

Adult Data

Adult female: 11/X MaryEllen, a 2012 hatch from Queen's Bluff in SE Minnesota

Adult male: H/34 Sawatzke, a 2009 hatch from Xcel's Monticello plant

Nesting Data

3 eggs laid | 2 eggs hatched

Hatch date: 5/29/13

- Female | 1947-18969 | B/20 | Patricia
- Male | 1126-14375 | 92/N | Lucky

Sawatzke returned for his second year to the GRE nestbox, soon after Mary Ellen arrived. Mary Ellen still had a lot of her juvenile feathers when she laid her eggs. Experienced Sawatzke played a key role in the first feeding and care of the young.



This year, the banding was attended by students from the 2nd grade class at the Epiphany Catholic School in Coon Rapids and young members of the Northwest Metro 4-H group from the Zimmerman area. Both groups followed the falcon family's growth and progress via Great River Energy's bird cam. The Epiphany students named the female eyass Patricia, after an assistant principle that they lost earlier this year. The 4-H students had a naming contest and 'Lucky' won. The students had a wonderful time and enjoyed meeting 'their' falcons in real life.



Mary Ellen with juvenile plumage, prior to egg-laying



A sleeker, more mature Mary Ellen in early fall

Year falcons first nested here: 2007 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 22

2013 Productive Nest Sites

06/28/2013: Minnesota Power's Hibbard Energy Center, Duluth, MN

Adult Data

Adult female: *R/*U Isabel, a 2009 hatch from the Colonnade Building in Minneapolis

Adult male: *Y/*B Arsene, a 2008 hatch from the Castle Danger cliff in Lake County MN

Nesting Data

4 eggs laid | 3 eggs hatched | 1 young died

- Female | 1947-18970 | B/21 | Liberty
- Male | 1126-14375 | 92/N | Lucky

Amy, the safety climbing team, and MPL employees Doug Braff and Harper Green went up the stack at Hibbard to band the young falcons. Although rain lashed the hills east and west of us, the stack stayed dry. We had cool, calm weather – perfect for banding! Although the adult female was initially somewhat aggressive, she backed off as more people came up the stack. We quickly completed our task, removed more detritus (primarily gull wings) from the nest box, and left.

A couple of people have asked about the gull wings. What is it with peregrines and gulls here? Peregrine falcons and many other animals use a form of camouflage called countershading – that is, they are dark above and light below. Gulls are not counter-shaded and they glow like light bulbs against the dark waters of the harbor. If they were that visible to me, a human that wears corrective lenses and squints in bright light, how much more visible would they be to peregrines? No wonder the falcons here eat so many of them!

Year falcons first nested here: 2009 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 13



MPL Employee Harper Green holds a falcon for banding

06/24/2013: Aggie's Bluff, Lansing, IA

We met in the parking lot/turn around below the bluff to look for falcons and work out the descent. We thought we heard young falcons as we drove toward the land owner's home. When we got to the top of the bluff, Bob confirmed it – the falcons had surprised us again. Neither Bob nor Dave nor Amy had witnessed any food transfers despite considerable time spent below the bluff. But watchers below spotted three young birds chasing a food-bearing adult. The falcons were clearly too old to band.

The bluff divides into two descents and Dave explored the top before pulling up rope. We'll need a separate rope tied off for descent #1, and one or two ropes, depending on the number of people, for descent #2.

Year falcons first nested here: 2012 | Total number of falcons produced here (2013): 7

2013 Non-Productive Nest Sites and Sightings

Xcel Energy Allen S. King Plant, Oak Park Heights, MN

- Female: Belinda
- Male: Brent

Belinda laid seven eggs this spring. We observed her incubating through some terrible weather, at times completely covered in snow. Two eggs hatched, but the young falcons died at roughly four days of age. Male Brent continued to incubate eggs for a while, earning the moniker 'Brent the Steadfast' but eventually quit as well. We were shocked in early July when Belinda appeared to re-clutch despite the presence of addled eggs in the box. The falcons were observed to return to full incubation on roughly July 7. Despite our hopes for a very late clutch, they stopped again in late July. This is the first time in 24 years that this box has failed.

Dairyland Power Genoa, Genoa, WI

- Female: unbanded
- Male: Lucas 40/N

The female here had an extraordinarily overgrown beak. She laid four eggs, of which just one hatched. The young falcon died soon after hatching and the female disappeared shortly afterwards. This site failed once before, in 2009, when the newly hatched young and their mother were displaced by a new female falcon.

Bay State Milling, Winona, MN

Although we don't know who the falcons here are, the female laid five eggs again this year. Last year, all five hatched. This year, none of them hatched. We do know that the fifth egg was laid ten days after egg number four and the falcons faced extraordinarily bad weather conditions during incubation. Like the King plant and Genoa, this site is usually successful when falcons nest here.

US Bank, LaCrosse, WI

Four eggs were laid and two falcons hatched, but building supervisor Jeff Blank reported that they disappeared from the box shortly after they hatched. We don't know what happened to them. This is the first year this site has failed since falcons started nesting here in 2006.

Alliant Lansing Bluff, Lansing, IA

Two adults were present but did not mount much of a defense. We checked both cliff nest boxes and a ledge. There were no signs of activity in either box. There did appear to be an attempt at a scrape on a ledge the falcons have used before, but we saw no eggs, eggshells, or signs of young.

Homer Bluff, Homer MN

A pair of falcons were weakly defending the bluff when we arrived to band. Bob rappelled down to the eyrie. No eggs or young, although Bob observed that the falcons had made a very nice scrape in the eyrie, which also

2013 Non-Productive Nest Sites and Sightings

contained a lot of whitewash and mutes. Dave checked some potholes on the north side of the bluff, but found nothing.

Shellhorn Bluff, Brownsville, MN

Amy checked the cliff. The eyrie had a tiny bit of whitewash, but no scrape (although the substrate is not good). While we saw falcons on and off here this spring, we saw no adult falcons on this visit.

Noble's Island, Harper's Ferry, IA

A mature female recently replaced the immature female we had seen here all spring. Dave thought it was possible she could lay eggs even though it was late in the season. A volunteer has reported adult falcons on site throughout the summer, but no young birds have been spotted.

Sightings

- Castle Rock. Falcons were spotted here but did not nest. We think this spot might be too close to Bay State Milling for nesting to occur in both places.
- Wyalusing Quarry. Bob identified male Joe 63/D, a 2010 hatch from the Alliant Columbia Generating Station in WI, and Larissa A/26, produced in 2012 from the Great River Energy plant in Elk River, MN. The pair did not produce any young, vanishing about midway through the nesting season.
- Twin Bluffs. Falcons were spotted at the nest box but did not nest.
- Trempealeau. The bluff's owner reported falcons, but the nest seems to have failed. This eyrie is overhung but quite small and exposed otherwise, so weather could have been a factor.
- Lynxville. Bob spotted falcons at a number of places on this bluff complex, but they do not appear to have successfully nested anywhere.
- Y-Bluff. This is a new site just south of Homer. Bob spotted falcons there a number of times in the early spring, but they disappeared prior to the start of nesting season. This may have been the pair that ended up at the Homer Bluff.
- Bob found two falcons defending a new cliff on the south end of the town of Lynxville, WI. The falcons were observed on several visits but then for some reason disappeared.

Eagles, Vultures, Owls, and Kestrels

Decorah Bald Eagles

As everyone knows, the Decorah eagles decided to build a new nest last fall. This is not uncommon behavior in bald eagles and we have an entire blog post on it here: <http://raptorresource.blogspot.com/2012/10/the-decorah-eagles-have-surprised-us.html>

For a while they appeared to be bouncing back and forth between the two nests, but we weren't especially surprised when they chose the new nest. While we don't have exact information on egg-laying and hatch dates, viewers were able to observe digiscoped long-distance video courtesy of Jim Womeldorf, whose videos can be watched on our youtube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/ries96>. They saw:

- 1st observed brooding on 2/19
- 1st observed feeding on 3/29
- 1st visual confirmation of 3 eaglets was 4/5.

The young eaglets fledged in mid-to-late June and immediately flew back in the old nest, which was larger and had more room. The family divided their time between both nests until mid-August, when the young appear to have dispersed.

Bob noted that the young eagles seemed a little more distant this year, spending less time at the hatchery and on the ground. We didn't attach any transmitters this year but are looking into the possibility of using tail-feather transmitters next year.

Fort St. Vrain Bald Eagles

Like so many of the birds we monitor, the Fort St. Vrain eagles were hit hard by the late, cold spring. The eagles laid three eggs beginning on February 17. The first and second hatched on March 29 and the third hatched on April 1. On April 16, a very heavy snowstorm struck the area and two of the young eaglets died. The third, nicknamed 'Survivor' survived to fledge in July.

SV Eagle Cam 1, Xcel Energy, Inc. 04/16/2013 08:28:14 AM



April 16 snowstorm. The female is completely covered by snow. Nest watchers observed that the young eaglets were left uncovered for an extended period of time while parents hunted for food.

Eagles, Vultures, Owls, and Kestrels

Marshall, Missouri Turkey Vultures

We were very excited about watching turkey vultures this year. Watching them last year was very interesting. They hissed, grunted, and stamped rather than singing, trilling, or calling. The young engaged in very active cainism early on, although both survived to fledge. They played and interacted a little differently than many of the young birds we watched (gut squabbles, anyone?), and we were amazed by their striking horaltic poses, which began about 51 days after they hatched.



Turkey vultures in the loft this spring, prior to egg-laying.

We first saw vultures in the loft on March 23rd. The female laid egg #1 on April 24. On April 25th, a turkey vulture came into the loft and destroyed the egg by rolling, banging, scraping, rubbing, and biting the egg on and off camera view. We speculated that there was an issue of paternity – perhaps the female had mated with another male in the original male's absence, or maybe a new male attempted to take over the nest. We have a longer blog post and video about it here: <http://raptorresource.blogspot.com/2013/04/avian-infanticide.html>

The turkey vultures deserted the barn. They were seen here a few more times, but they were always in a hurry – approaching the old nest area cautiously and leaving very quickly. We don't know whether or not they will return. Dead vultures are sometimes used to drive living ones from a roosting area. We'll see if this holds true with egg destruction next spring.

Valmont Owls

Once again, we saw a nest box fail under poor weather conditions. The resident owls laid three eggs between February 12th and February 18th, but the eggs failed to hatch.

This nest has a mixed history. It failed in 2010 when incubation was disrupted by a territorial battle. In 2009, another cold, snowy spring, Snowflake stopped incubating following a massive snowstorm. The nest also failed in 2007 following heavy snow, although the owls reclushed and hatched young later in April. We don't know for sure that the nest failed because of cold weather, but we've seen it happen here before.

Pawnee Kestrels

The Pawnee kestrels were sighted back in the box on February 2nd. They laid their first egg on April 12th and hatch started on May 21st. Three of five eggs hatched – a slightly lower number than is common here. All three young kestrels fledged.

Eagles, Vultures, Owls, and Kestrels

Kestrel Nestbox Project

In 2012, Bob decided he wanted to experiment with using county right-of-way ditches on rural roads as potential nesting habitat for kestrels. He and board member John Dingley built six boxes, and Bob, John, and Amy installed them on an extremely hot and sunny day in September of 2012.

Four of six boxes survived the winter. Of the two that failed, one was vandalized and the other developed a serious lean. Bob and David and Anne Lynch retrofitted the surviving boxes with concrete at the base to prevent them from tipping over, and checked the boxes. Three of the four contained nesting kestrels, indicating that ditch habitat could be helpful in restoring kestrels to the parts of their range where they have dwindled.

We were not able to band the kestrels this spring – two of the boxes were too young and one of them was too old. We will be adjusting our schedules accordingly next spring. For more on Bob's ideas about the voleways, check this blog post: <http://raptorresource.blogspot.com/2013/08/kestrel-nest-box-update.html>. A big thanks to county engineer Lee Bjerke for giving us permission to install the boxes in Winneshiek County's right-of-way.



Board member John Dingley with the kestrel nest boxes.