

2014 Raptor Resource Banding Report



Frannie 16/U at Xcel Energy Blackdog. Photo courtesy Daniel Meyer

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2014: Year of the Blackfly

2014 has been a most interesting year for the Raptor Resource Project. In late February and early March, we watched the Decorah eagles lay eggs on a frozen nest in sub-zero temperatures. In previous years, the weather was often warm enough that they could spend some time away from the eggs, but they incubated almost continuously this year. We weren't sure that even one egg would hatch, so imagine our relief when all three did! Life in the nest proceeded relatively normally until late May, when the blackfly population exploded! When I zoomed the camera in for tight shots on the eaglets, I was shocked to see thousands of flies crawling in and out of their head feathers. They developed a perpetual twitch to shake off the pests and were constantly scratching their heads. It was a miserable sight.



Eaglets with gnats. Video at <http://youtu.be/TPOjF1hNZ7o>

The eaglets began fledging on June 18th.

While they were old enough to fledge, it went very poorly. The first fledgling wasn't found until eight days after fledge began. We captured it, examined it, and put a transmitter on it. I spent the next several weeks following Four. Initially, she didn't fly and spent her nights roosting on the ground. I saw her begging food, but I didn't see her hunting or engaging in hunting behaviors. The second fledgling was found on Sunday, June 29 – eleven days after fledge began. He was lying on the rocks of trout creek near the original nest, with a badly broken wing. He was sent to SOAR for rehabilitative care. Despite their ages, the fledglings didn't seem well-developed enough to fledge. I can't help but wonder if the relentless blackfly hammer delayed their development. A number of studies have found that parasites can delay development and we've seen it ourselves with peregrine falcons and hippoboscids flies.

The blackfly problem was not limited to Decorah. With our high resolution cameras, we confirmed the black flies driving the solo eyass at Great Spirit Bluff mad, forcing him to jump from his eyrie almost two weeks before he was ready for his maiden flight. We also witnessed swarms of black flies in Eagle Valley, where one young eaglet died of an unknown cause in June. Its body was intact and it had food in its crop and ample fat reserves, so it didn't starve or



Falcon Mac and gnats

succumb to an attack. We believe that blackflies may have played a role in its demise, possibly by clogging its airways and causing it to asphyxiate. Similar deaths were reported in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin this year, and black flies also caused loons to abandon their nests in northern Minnesota. The mind staggers when thinking of just how many species of birds, both big and small, were affected by this one species of biting gnat.

Having said that, this year was better for our falcons than 2013 was. We banded falcons at 20 sites and had 23 sites for a total of 70 young falcons in 2014, although several usually productive sites failed. We had zero production at King, Sherco, and Clay-Boswell. The eggs at Clay-Boswell froze, while territorial fighting and freezing seem to have played a role in the failures at King and Sherco. However, three normally non-productive sites were productive this year and Twin Bluffs finally came online! These sites made up for losses elsewhere. An interesting highlight from the Great Spirit Bluff nest, which produced one falcon this year: Michelle carries a frozen empty egg from the nest. <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/47834005/highlight/506389>.

This year we confirmed having two natural cliff eyries that we cannot safely access for banding. These cliffs will continue to fledge un-banded young falcons for eons to come. At first I was a bit disappointed that we could not band these young falcons, but it was our goal to return the Peregrine falcon to these historical nest sites and we did. This is all that is important. I encourage everyone to follow the link below to an Iowa Public TV film that documents the huge effort it took to return the falcon to the Upper Mississippi river scenic bluffs: <http://youtu.be/USQs4Bwxa18>. It moves me every time I watch it.

RRP has for the first time developed two bird cams that are not pointed at raptors. When the tornado struck Minneapolis in 2011, causing the loss of our dear friend Rob MacIntyre, a Great Blue heron colony was also destroyed. The herons moved to a small island adjacent to the Xcel Energy Riverside plant in north Minneapolis. This year we installed a PTZ camera pointing at the heron colony and created the world's first Great Blue Heron colony cam. We also joined with the Althea R. Sherman foundation and the Cedar County Historical Society to establish a Swift cam. Although the herons have fledged and the swifts will be fledging shortly, the cams can be watched at <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/xcel-riverside> and <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/swift-cam>.

The climbing team this year consisted of Amy Ries, Dave Kester, John Howe, and to a lesser extent myself. A rotator cuff injury has greatly limited my being able to ascend on rope. However, on June 8, Dave Kester and I rappelled down rope to the Lansing power plant cliff eyrie and banded four lovely eyas falcons. When we were finished, I continued rappelling down rope to the end and Dave ascended and pulled my climbing rope. It was great to be back on rope. Thanks Dave and Tim Hayes!

We also had one electrocution this year. Eagle Indy, one of the 2014 Decorah fledglings, was found dead at the foot of a high-powered transmission line roughly a mile from the nest. The company reported the death and we are talking with them about ways the line can be protected. We've done a lot and there is so much more to do! Valmont and Fort St. Vrain enthusiasts will be excited to hear that we are heading for Colorado to work on both of those cams. We're working with Cornell University and the Philippine Eagle Foundation on a live cam for 2016, and we hope to get the Philippine Eagle Center's cam back up and running in the meantime. We also have a few more peregrine falcon nest box projects coming up and we'd love to deploy some new kestrel nest boxes as well. We are hoping that D1's transmitter turns back on (we last heard from it on June 28th, in Polar Bear Provincial Park) and are following Four online also: <http://www.raptorresource.org/maps/latest.php>. We hope you enjoy the maps as much as we do!

Acknowledgements

We wrote the Raptor Resource Project's 2014 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 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. 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.

Education is part of our mission. A deeply heartfelt thanks to our moderators on Ustream and Facebook – especially Ustream lead mod ThinkingWoman and Facebook lead mod Sherri Elliott. Your leadership, dedication, and hard work are a vital part of our success. A shoutout to Pagent for her very hard work organizing the After the Fledge party. I had so much fun watching people meet the mods and other online friends for the first time! It brought home to me how special this group is. As Bob said during his speech at ATF “I’ve heard that technology divides people. But look at all the people it’s brought together here!” Our mods 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 thanks also to the people who capture and post video to YouTube, especially 70chico1, crayj46, mochamama, blossom holland, eaglewhisperer18, and knarley123. Your hard work makes sure no one misses life in our nests.

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, Ricky Socha, Jim Larson, Dean Pagel, Chuck Bremer, Roger, Wayne, Mike McShane, Jim Fuchs, Paul Gerbec, Isaac Fuchs, Mike Long, Dan Meyer, Brian Schmidt, Frank Sperlak, Brad Foss, Nathan Helder, Doug Braff, Karen Kiekow, Jeff Blank, Dani Swanson, 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!

A big thanks to landowners, site volunteers, and DNR staff, including Gary Grunwald, Myrna Buri, Peter and Kay Walsh, Mark and Michelle Schnick, Norm and Joyce Caley, the Howe family, Jim and Aggie Olson, Dan and Sheila Broughtman, Wally Truttman, Mark Rasmussen, Gary Wolf, Rebecca Dick, and Pat Schlarbaum. We appreciate your support and help.

A big thanks to the technical support staff at Ustream and Simms Electronics in Decorah, especially Joanna Dorfman and Alden Fertig from Ustream, and Kenny from Sims Electric. Sadly, we said goodbye to a very special volunteer and friend this year. Camera operator Charlie Forman passed away on June 28, 2014. His obituary can be read here: <http://hosting-22883.tributes.com/obituary/show/Charles-J.-CJ-Forman-101481020>. Charlie, thanks so much for your help. We miss you.

Thanks also to John Howe for his work researching cellular modems, cams, and other technologies, and manning Great Spirit Bluff along with wife Susan. A special thanks to Brett Mandernack, Jason Thiele, and Ryan Schmitz for helping to band falcons and trap Four. A shoutout to dragonlaine, eaglewhisperer18, blossemholland and mochamama for their many excellent videos documenting life in our nests, to Elaine Black for the very cute rubber band eagles, and to auntfish for the screeee hats! Fred and Laverne Calkins, thanks for your ongoing support. We hope to see you in Iowa next year!

Fans of the Valmont and Fort St. Vrain cams will be happy to know that Valmont is coming back and Fort St. Vrain is getting some improvements. We drove out to Colorado to meet Dave Madonna and Bill Heston from Xcel Energy's Valmont and Fort St. Vrain plants. It was wonderful to meet them and they were very enthusiastic about their sites and birds. It is great to have such wonderful advocates on site. We look forward to working with them!

Productive Sites

5/28/14: Alliant Nelson-Dewey, Cassville WI

Adult data

Adult Female: Milly R/89, a 2009 hatch from Horizon Milling in Lake City, MN.

Adult Male: Unknown

Nesting data

Four eggs laid, four eggs hatched

Hatch began: estimated 05/09/14

- | | | | |
|--------------|------|--------|----------|
| • 1126-14376 | 93/N | Male | Ricochet |
| • 1126-14377 | 94/N | Male | Lambeau |
| • 1126-14378 | 95/N | Male | Tucker |
| • 1947-20020 | C/52 | Female | Penelope |

What a beautiful morning to start banding! Amy Ries, Paul Lassance, Ricky Socha, and Jason Thiele went up the stack. Judging from the prey remains in the nestbox and on the catwalk, which Jason identified as two eastern meadowlarks, a red-bellied woodpecker, and a rosy-breasted grosbeak, the falcons are eating well. Mother Milly came from Horizon Milling in Lake City, MN, about 134 miles northwest. Milly's mother was Lolo. Lolo's father was Smoke, who grew up on cam at Xcel Energy's Allen S. King plant in 1998. Smoke's mother was falcon Mae, the first falcon to nest on a smokestack, and Mae's mother was MF-1, produced by Bob for the Minnesota Falconers Association, who in 1987 became the first falcon to breed in the wild mid-continent since the early 1960s. What a lineage!



Paul Lassance with Ricochet

Paul Lassance is retiring. Paul, thank you for being a friend to the falcons – it's been great to work with you.

Falcons first nested: 2001 | Total number of young produced (2014): 42

5/28/14: Bunge North America, McGregor IA

Adult data

Adult Female: *U/*R Bubbles, a 2009 hatch from the 3M watertower in Cottage Grove, MN.

Adult Male: 88/S Rocket (male banded female), a 2011 hatch from Alliant Cassville in Cassville, WI.

Hatch data

Unknown number of eggs laid, three eggs hatched

Hatch began: estimated 05/08/14

- | | | | |
|--------------|------|--------|--------|
| • 1947-20021 | C/53 | Female | Farrah |
| • 1947-20022 | C/54 | Female | Kate |
| • 1947-20023 | C/55 | Female | Jaclyn |



Brett Mandernack on the stackhouse

We arrived at the grain elevator at 3:00pm. High water along the Mississippi river had made it impossible to get a barge into the elevator until May 28th, so the plant was very busy loading trucks. Brett Mandernack, Ryan Schmidt, and Dave Kester went up to the roof while Bob, Jason, and Amy worked to get adult band numbers from a platform below the grain elevator. The gnats were terrible, but we doused ourselves with vanilla to keep them off and Bob was able to get both numbers. New plant manager Isaac Brehmer was happy to hear that the three men found abundant pigeon remains near the nest box.

Mom Bubbles (named after an Angry Birds character) is nesting about 150 miles southeast of her natal nest. We can trace her lineage back to Zeus, a project-produced bird that was released in Rochester, New York. Zeus eventually flew to Omaha and settled at the Woodmen Tower, establishing the first peregrine nest in Nebraska. Dad Rocket was a male we banded female in 2011. If we are unsure of a bird's gender, we band female since those bands are larger. Rocket is more or less a local, since his natal nest is located just 22 miles downstream from Bunge North America.

Falcons first nested: 2010 | Total number of young produced (2014): 11

5/30/14: US Bank, LaCrosse WI

Adult data

Adult Male: C/80 b/g Burt, a 2005 hatch from Castle Rock, about 28 miles north of US Bank.

Adult Female: unknown

Hatch data

Four eggs laid, three eggs hatched

Hatch began: 04/10/14

- | | | | |
|--------------|------|--------|--------|
| • 1126-14379 | 96/N | Male | Roman |
| • 1947-20024 | C/56 | Female | Harper |
| • 1947-20025 | C/57 | Female | Addy |

I love banding at US Bank. You walk into a lovely atrium, check the nest monitor to verify how old the falcons are, and take a nice elevator up to the roof! This year, Dave and Bob went up. Dave blocked the front of the nest box while Bob removed the roof, handing it to John Howe, who was waiting below. They quickly loaded the young falcons into the kennel and headed back downstairs, where a large crowd was waiting for them. All of the falcons were named after children in the crowd, who really enjoyed a chance to see the eyasses up close. A big thanks to building supervisor Jeff Blank for keeping us on top of this site and letting everyone know about the banding. More can be found here: <http://goo.gl/TNMBOH>. Although Bob replaced the nest box here just a few years ago, it has weathered and needs to be replaced.



Eyasses in transport at US Bank

Year falcons first nested: 2006 | Total number of young produced (2014): 20

5/30/14: Aggie's Bluff, Lansing IA

We were all looking forward to Aggie's Bluff. We'd first identified falcons here in 2012, but had been too late to band them in 2012 and 2013. We were sure we would get them this year! We picked up landowners Aggie and James Olson. Aggie and Bob sat in the parking area below the bluff, while Dave, Amy, John, and James headed up top. James very kindly gave us a ride back to the site, which is across a large field on top of the bluff.

We determined last year that the cliff had at least two stages. Amy and Dave rappelled down to the first stage, a small plateau covered in vegetation. Dave tried to get around to the front of the cliff, but it turned out to be a tall chimney that required free-climbing up the back. With no way to protect the rope, we decided after four grueling hours to abandon the site.

6/02/14: Xcel Energy Blackdog, Burnsville MN

Adult data

Adult Female: 16/U Frannie, a 2011 hatch from the Stearns County Correctional Facility in St. Cloud, MN

Adult Male: H/38 Cooper, a 2010 hatch from the Colonnade Building in Golden Valley, MN

Hatch data

Four eggs laid, four eggs hatched

Hatch began: 5/12/14

- | | | | |
|--------------|------|--------|----------|
| • 1156-14915 | 02/D | Male | Schmidt |
| • 1156-15916 | 01/D | Male | Danberg |
| • 1947-19000 | A/39 | Female | deceased |
| • 1947-18971 | A/40 | Female | Marion |

Amy and lead electrician Dan Meyer climbed the stack to face the wrath of Frannie! She began swooping, diving, and striking the moment that Dan opened the stack door. After she got Dan's hand we retreated back inside and found a pole, which Dan held up to distract Frannie and keep her at a distance. Father Cooper was also on the defense. Although not as aggressive as Frannie, he came closer than males usually do, diving in a series of short, vertical loops that rapidly brought him around to the front of the nest box. Both of them were amazing to watch!

Since we had a bad hippoboscids infestation here last year, I checked the eyasses carefully for signs of parasites. All four falcons were healthy, well-fed, and parasite free. Falcon Marion grounded during fledging and was taken to a plant roof and released. Another female was found dead on the ground shortly after fledging.

As we've seen at many of our other nests, male Cooper is nesting a little closer to home than his mate. The Colonnade Building is about 12 miles away from Blackdog, while the Stearns County Correctional Facility clocks in at 68 miles distant.

Falcons first nested: 1993 | Total number of young produced (2014): 60



Frannie 16/U defends her nest

06/04/14: Horizon Milling, Lake City MN

Adult data

Adult Female: *Y/*P Charlette, a 2008 hatch from Wells Fargo Bank in Bloomington MN.

Adult Male: K/U Gretch, a 2000 hatch from Dairyland Power Genoa in Genoa, WI.

Hatch data

Unknown number of eggs laid, three eggs hatched

Hatch began: estimated 5/15/14

1947-20026	C/58	Female	Sara
1947-20027	C/59	Female	Faye
1156-14938	E/68	Male	Leonardo

Horizon Milling is another great site! They are very supportive of their falcons and it is always nice to see them again. Bob, Dave, Amy, and plant employees Jim Fuchs and Roger Wilson went up to the roof and quickly banded the falcons. The nest box here was built by John's son Jonathon Howe as part of Jonathon's Eagle Scout project. It opens from the back, tipping up and covering the front to prevent the eyasses from jumping out. The design keeps human banders and falcon eyasses safer, since we don't have to reach around the front and they can't bump.

Like a number of our falcons, both Charlette and Gretch can trace their pedigrees back to birds released by RRP. Charlette's lineage can be traced back to Maverick, who was produced by Bob and released in 1988 at Mayo Clinic. Gretch's father was produced by Bob and released in 1995 at

Consumers Power in Ottawa, MI. Horizon Milling is roughly 55 miles from the Wells Fargo Bank, where Charlette was produced, and about 79 miles from Dairyland Power Genoa, where Gretch was produced.

Falcons first nested: 2002 | Total number of young produced (2014): 44



Waiting for bands at Horizon Milling

06/04/14: P-4 (Homer Bluff), Homer MN

Adult data

Adults unknown

Hatch data

Unknown number of eggs laid, three eggs hatched

Hatch began: estimated 05/17/14

- | | | | |
|--------------|------|--------|----------|
| • 1947-20028 | C/60 | Female | Sylvie |
| • 1947-20029 | C/61 | Female | Mally |
| • 1156-14939 | E/69 | Male | Hankbird |

Falcons haven't nested successfully here since 2008, so we were thrilled to see them again. They've moved from the large pothole in the crack on the cliff's downstream face to a smaller pothole on the upstream side, below a large gully. We were joined up top by Graham Wellington from WildEarth TV, landowners Peter and Kay Walsh and two of their friends. Graham took the top, Amy stationed herself in the gully, and Dave rappelled down and got the eyasses. He loaded them into the kennel and Graham and Bob hauled them up top to band.

It was a wonderful, sunny day for banding and a great time was had by all! Peter and Kay are great people, and so enthusiastic about birds! I hope we get to see them again next year.



Graham and Bob banding at Homer Bluff

Falcons first nested: 2007 | Total number of young produced (2014): 9

06/06/14: Great River Energy, Elk River MN

Adult data

Adult Female: 11/X Mary Ellen, a 2012 hatch from Queen's Bluff south of Winona, MN.

Adult Male: H/34 Sawatzke, a 2009 hatch from Xcel Energy's plant in Monticello, MN.

Hatch data

Four eggs laid, three eggs hatched

Hatch began: 05/17/14

- | | | | |
|--------------|------|--------|--------|
| • 1947-18999 | A/41 | Female | Bullet |
| • 1947-20001 | A/42 | Female | Andee |
| • 1156-14917 | 03/D | Male | Meeker |

On 3/8/14 Mary Ellen returned for her second year at GRE, and on 3/29/14 Sawatzke returned for his third year. In the early morning hours of 5/18/14, Mary Ellen suddenly left the nest box three different times.

Unfortunately, one of the newly hatched eyasses was caught by her wing the third time she left. It was found dead below the nest box the following morning. While this sort of accident isn't common, it happened several years ago at Lock and Dam 9, and it may be what happened to an eyass at Great Spirit Bluff two years ago.



Amy and Brenda banding

Amy Ries led the banding. This year, 56 students from the 2nd grade class at the Epiphany Catholic School in Coon Rapids attended the banding. They followed the falcon family's growth and progress in their classroom via the Great River Energy's bird cam. The students had a naming contest and named the two female eyasses Andee and Bullet. A big thanks to Brenda Geisler of GRE for assisting in banding. Brenda is a great friend to the falcons and I love working with her – she knows everything about the falcons!

Falcons first nested: 2007 | Total number of young produced (2014): 24

06/07/14: P-17 (Great Spirit Bluff), Dresbach MN

Adult data

Adult Female: P/87 Michelle, a 2005 hatch from Maassen's Bluff south of Nelson, WI.

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

Hatch data

Five eggs laid, one egg hatched

Hatch began: 05/18/14

- 1156-14940 E/70 Male MacIntosh

Michelle laid five eggs again this year, but was only able to hatch one. The extreme cold appears to have caused the other four to freeze. She was seen eating two and carrying away one. We are not sure what happened to egg number four, but at least one of them hatched.

We were dodging raindrops when we arrived to band. Would we go down the cliff? We would! We had to make it fast, though, unless we wanted to get everything wet. Bob, John, and Amy quickly tied off and climbed down. Like Aggie's bluff, Great Spirit Bluff is climbed in stages. Bob stayed on the first stage, Amy stayed on the second stage, and John rappelled down to collect MacIntosh. Amy got him up to Bob, who banded him in under a minute. We got back up and down as quickly as we could, beating the rain and keeping everything dry.



John on Great Spirit Bluff

While John was down at the nest box, he treated it with vanilla to ward away gnats. However, on the evening of June 16th, MacIntosh was driven out of the box by gnats. Footage saved from that day shows gnats and other insects flying in and out of the box while Mac frantically shakes, twitches, and scratches. As the afternoon wears on, MacIntosh becomes increasingly agitated, pacing the box and moving back and forth between the back two corners and front of the box, where a little breeze appears to give him some relief. He eventually tries to hop from the lip of the box to the perch, but slips and falls instead.

Mac was 28 days old and flapping, so we were hopeful he survived the fall. Gerooge Howe went to look for him below the bluff but was unable to find him. However, Michelle and Travis were clearly spending a lot of time below the bluff and regular watchers reported hearing Mac. On June 21, John Howe caught Mac on camera, perched in a tree below the bluff. He eventually fledged successfully and has been seen several times since.

Prior to installing a cam here, we did not know that adult falcons would enter such dense vegetation to find and care for young. Michelle and Travis needed to haul prey into and fly out of a tangle of vegetation. The conventional belief was that young which fell would die even if they survived the fall. The camera has proven that wrong and made us wonder how many young have fledged from the talus.

Falcons first nested: 2005 | Total number of young produced (2014): 31

06/08/14: P-15 Alliant Lansing Cliff, Lansing IA

Adult data

Adults unknown

Hatch data

Four eggs laid, four eggs hatched

Hatch began: estimated 05/19/14

- 1947-20031 C/63 Female Pagent
- 1947-20032 C/62 Female Calkin
- 1947-20033 C/64 Female Wisdom
- 1156-14942 E/72 Male Jaeger

The falcons nested in the old nest box at the downstream end of the cliff this year. When we stopped in late May, the falcons were too young to band. Bob, Dave, and Dave's friend Tim Hayes returned to Lansing to band the falcons on the wall. Bob and Dave rappelled down to the box, and Tim guarded ropes on top.

Banding at the box isn't easy. It can be hard to hold the falcons and the rope and wall provide very little leverage. Fortunately, the adults here aren't especially aggressive and Bob and Dave were able to get the job done quickly. It was good to see this site productive again, although we might want to spend some time this fall clearing honeysuckle bushes from the ledges above the box.

Falcons first nested: 2001 | Total number of your produced (2014): 31

06/09/14: Dairyland Power Alma, Alma WI

Adult data

Adult Female: R/63 Power, a 2008 hatch from an RRP box at Alliant Cassville in Cassville, WI.

Adult Male: C/97 Kiwi, a 2006 hatch from an RRP box at the Allen S. King plant in Oak Park Heights, MN.

Hatch data

Four eggs laid, three eggs hatched

Hatch began: 05/20/14

- 1156-14937 E/71 Male Mack
- 1156-14943 E/73 Male DC
- 1156-14944 E/74 Male Star

Hedwig, last year's resident female, arrived at the plant in early March. Shortly before we expected egg-laying to begin, she was displaced by Power R/63, the resident female from 2012. Once again, Power chose the stack over the cliff. The stack nest box 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.



20-day old falcon at Alma

We were joined by Brad Foss, the biologist from Dairyland Power, Mark Rasmussen, a biologist from the Wisconsin DNR, Gary Wolf, a wildlife technician from the Wisconsin DNR, and several interns. It was nice to see

a group of male eyasses given all the females we had banded to date. The little guys were healthy and feisty. I need to bring a decibel meter next year so we can find out just how loud they get!

A big thanks to Brad and Mark. Brad has been a great advocate for the falcons and always manages to get us band numbers and helpful site information. It was wonderful to meet Mark, who was very enthusiastic about our falcon work in particular and conservation overall.

Falcons first nested: 1997 | Total number of young produced (2014): 63

06/09/14: Twin Bluff, Nelson WI

Adult data

Adults unknown

Hatch data

Unknown number of eggs laid, three eggs hatched

Hatch began: estimated 05/22/14

- 1156-14945 E/75 Male Ruger
- 1156-14946 E/76 Male Ole
- 1947-20034 C/65 Female Viola

We put a nestbox up in 2009 and, after several years of teasing us, falcons finally produced young here this spring! It was such a thrill to contact landowner Myrna Buri and tell her the box was productive.

We followed Myrna up the back of the bluff and located the site after a little wandering through the brush. It's amazing how much sites change when you don't see them every year. Amy roped off and rappelled down to the box to collect the eyasses. Dave hauled them up and Bob banded them. This site is really neat – the falcons have a great view and wonderful hunting

grounds in the Tiffany Bottoms. The box was filled with small black feathers and the falcons were clearly eating well.

A big thanks to Myrna for her enthusiasm and the pie!

Falcons first nested: 2014 | Total number of young produced (2014): 3



*Dave having fun on Twin Bluff
Photo credit: Rebecca Dick*



*Banding on top
Photo credit: Rebecca Dick*

06/09/14: Maassen's Bluff, Nelson WI

Adult data

Adults unknown. Gary Grunwald reported that the original female may have been driven away or killed in an altercation on 04/20/14.

Hatch data

Unknown number of eggs laid, three hatched

Hatch began: estimated 05/20/14

- 1947-20035 C/67 Female Kaiya
- 1947-20036 C/68 Female Elliott
- 1947-20037 C/69 Female Layla

Two cliffs and one power plant make for a busy day! Bob and Gary Grunwald stayed down below while Amy, Dave, Mark, Gary Wolf, and the interns went up the back of the bluff. We drove in to the first gate and walked the rest of the way, so we were glad for the extra help! Amy tied off on top of the cliff and Dave went down. Everything was going well until the hollering started! The unknown female, nicknamed Mrs. Mamba for this season, didn't care much for Dave. He debated scrubbing the banding but soldiered on following a lively conversation with Bob and Amy. After Dave got the eyasses, he retreated to a cave-sized pothole above the eyrie while Amy banded on top. The young falcons had huge, thick legs – big even for females!

Dave, meanwhile, was surprised to find raccoon poop in the pothole. We've found raccoon poop in a number of precarious places, but this pothole was easily 40 feet down from the top of the cliff and the overhanging wall looked pretty sheer to all of us. We think the falcons might have been caching prey in the pothole, which attracted raccoon. Fortunately, they didn't want to or weren't able to continue down into the eyrie. It was great seeing production at Maassen's Bluff again.

Falcons first nested: 2001 | Total number of young produced (2014): 17



*Mark and Amy band a falcon
Photo credit: Rebecca Dick*



*View from Maassen's Bluff
Photo credit: Rebecca Dick*

06/10/14: Dairyland Power Genoa, Genoa WI

Adult data

Adult Female: 83/W Roschen, a 2012 hatch from Horizon Milling in Lake City, MN

Adult Male: 40/N Lucas, a 2004 hatch from Dairyland Power Alma in Alma, WI

Hatch data

Four eggs laid, four eggs hatched

Hatch began: 05/20/14

- 1156-14947 E/77 Male Bergmeister
- 1156-14948 E/78 Male Energy
- 1156-14949 E/79 Male Solaris
- 1947-20038 C/70 Female Lynnley II

Bob and Brad Foss banded four healthy young falcons at Dairyland Power Genoa. The Genoa falcons nest on the 400' level of a power plant stack, which is reached via an outside elevator.

Female Roschen can trace her pedigree back through MF-1, who was produced by Bob Anderson and named for the Minnesota Falconers Association. As mentioned previously, MF-1 was the first bird to return to the wild and breed mid-continent following the species' extirpation in the early to mid-1960s. Lucas's father fledged from Castle Rock in 2002 – the first year that site was active. Unfortunately, we don't have a band number for either of his parents, so the pedigree stops there.

Falcons first nested: 1998 | Total number of young produced (2014): 50

06/10/14: Red Wing Grain, Red Wing MN

Adult data

Adults unknown

Hatch data

Four eggs laid, four eggs hatched

Hatch began: 05/20/14

- 1947-20002 A/43 Female Julia
- 1947-20003 A/44 Female Eva
- 1947-20004 A/45 Female Mara

Last year, we had two nestlings die of an unknown cause. On May 26 this year, followers of Red Wing Grain alerted us that something was wrong by sending several captures of the nestlings laying on their backs, with their feet in the air. Amy visited the plant on May 28 to take a look. All four young falcons were badly infested with Hippoboscids. Two seemed relatively healthy, one was quite chilly but still alert, and Amy thought one was dead when she removed it from the box, although it revived somewhat when she picked up. She very quickly cleaned all four falcons, removed prey remains, and dusted the gravel with Sevin. Three of the falcons survived. They appeared healthy and well developed when she came back to band on June 10.



Banding at Red Wing Grain

I forgot the drill and the elevator was out. Guess who had to race down 190 feet to grab it and come back up? I don't think I'll forget it again.

Falcons first nested: 2000 | Total number of young produced (2014): 36

06/11/14: 3M Watertower, Cottage Grove, MN

Adult data

Adult Female: unbanded

Adult male: unknown

Hatch data

Unknown number of eggs laid, three hatched

Hatch began: 05/22/14

- 1947-20040 C/71 Female
- 1947-20044 C/72 Female
- 1947-20041 C/73 Female

On April 9, plant contact Paul Gerbec reported that resident male Charlie 64/P was found injured on the ground. Although Paul raced Charlie over to the Raptor Center, Charlie was very seriously injured and had to be euthanized. When we initially got the message, we were afraid the site would fail. However, 3M staff reported a new male in the nest box a few hours after Charlie was found. It appears that Charlie was injured in a territorial battle. Based on dates, there is a good chance that the winning male cared for young that were sired by Charlie. All three young were healthy and we're glad the site was productive following Charlie's death.



View from the nest box, 3M water tower

Falcons first nested: 2008 | Total number of young produced (2014): 21

06/12/14: Bay State Milling, Winona MN

Adult data

Adults unknown

Hatch data

Five eggs laid, four eggs hatched

Hatch began: 05/15/14

- | | | | |
|--------------|------|--------|----------|
| • 1947-20042 | C/74 | Female | Maggie |
| • 1156-14950 | E/80 | Male | CJ |
| • 1156-14951 | E/81 | Male | Lubinski |
| • 1156-14952 | E/82 | Male | Charlie |

Ouch! The young here were around 28 days of age and a real handful! Bob and Amy both ended up bleeding from a banding that could be accurately described as 'foot foot foot bite'. Plant staff report that all four young

fledged successfully and could be seen flying around the plant, harassing the local pigeon population and giving plant workers and visitors a treat.

Unfortunately, the nest box is a safety hazard and needs to be removed. We are hopeful that the falcons will return to Castle Rock, located roughly a mile upstream in on the Wisconsin side of the river. Two of the eyasses this year were named after Rick and Maggie Lubinski, the father/daughter team who got a nest box installed here as part of a 4H project in 2001. To read more about how the box was originally installed, follow this link: <http://www.winonapost.com/archive/030701/2news030701.html>

Year falcons first nested here: 2009 | Total number of young produced (2014): 15

06/13/14: Shellhorn North, Brownsville MN

Adult data

Adults unknown

Hatch data

Unknown number of eggs laid, three hatched

Hatch began: estimated 05/24/14

- 1947-20043 C/75 Female Michelle
- 1947-20045 C/76 Female Onekey
- 1156-14953 E/83 Male Brandon

In the past, falcons have nested at the Shellhorn bluff, a very large and crumbly face located just upstream from the Shellhorn Bar. This year, we spotted them on a far smaller face a few hundred feet north of their usual location. For whatever reason, the falcons abandoned a large face for a smaller one. They also abandoned the standard pothole or small rocky ledge for a large ledge covered with vegetation. Although there isn't any protection from overhangs or potholes, a tree provided some shelter from sunshine and weather. The young falcons have plenty of space to wander and it would be very easy to band on the ledge if needed.

A big thanks to property owners Mark and Michelle for their bluff land conservation and support! The top of the bluff is a beautiful grassland that also supports a healthy population of black rat snakes, an endangered species in Minnesota. It is wonderful to see such beautiful land conserved for future generations and their interest in the falcons is very helpful to our work.

I'm lumping the count in with Shellhorn since both cliffs are within the same territory.

Year falcons first nested here: 2008 | Total number of young produced (2014): 4

06/14/14: P-10 (West Bluff), Maiden Rock WI

West Bluff can be a hard site to get into. Dave was unable to reach the eyrie safely and we eventually scrubbed the banding. We verified that three young were produced here.

A big thanks to Dan and Sheila Broughton for arranging access. We hope to see you next year.

Year falcons first nested here: 2005 | Total number of young produced (2014): 24

06/14/14: P-11 (Maiden Rock), Maiden Rock, WI

Adult data

Adults unknown

Hatch data

Unknown number of eggs laid, two hatched

Hatch began: estimated 05/23/14

- 1156-14954 E/84 Male Geisler
- 1947-20046 C/77 Female Mabel

Even on a wet day, Maiden Rock is fun! Bob, Amy, Dave, John, Bob, and Brenda Geisler drove back to the site and Gary Grunwald guided us in from the bottom. The falcons were nesting in a large pothole a few feet downstream of last year's site. Amy rappelled down to the pothole, John rappelled about halfway down, and Dave took the top.

The pothole was extremely deep – more like a cave than a pothole. The young falcons immediately ran to the back. On one hand, it was nice that we didn't have to worry about jumping. On the other hand, this made them very hard to get. Amy managed to squirm her way into the cave after pulling a lot of slack and throwing the rope over her shoulder. Male Geisler was captured relatively easily, but female Mabel wanted nothing to do with us. After trying a usually-helpful Bob tip (give the eyass something to foot and gently pull it out once it's snagged), Amy stretched out as long as she could, got a toe, and captured the falcon for banding. Whew! What a relief! The up team quickly banded the falcons and we got them returned before the raindrops started falling.

Bob named one of the females Mabel in honor of the original land owner. Mabel Long was a real friend of conservation. She sold Maiden Rock to the West Wisconsin Land Trust and Wisconsin DNR so it could be preserved instead of developed. Her action made it possible for future generations of humans, falcons, and many other species to enjoy this matriarch of Mississippi river cliffs. For years, the cliff attracted everyone with an interest in peregrine falcons. Mabel is gone, but her legacy remains.

Year falcons first nested here: 2001 | Total number of falcons produced here (2014): 30



Geisler and Mabel in the eyrie. Falcons don't build stick nests.

06/24/14: Rob's Nestbox, Greysolon Plaza, Duluth MN

Adult data

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

Adult Male: unbanded

Hatch data

Four eggs laid, one egg hatched

Hatch began: Estimated 05/28/14

- 1156-14955 E/85 Male Dani

We arrived to band on a rainy, foggy day. Bob and Amy got the window washing rig over to the nest box and Bob captured the extremely aggressive female while Amy rigged up. This made banding much easier. Midway through, the crew from Hawk Ridge in Duluth joined us! A big thanks to building manager Dani Swanson for supporting the falcons, and to Janelle Long and Katie Swanson for lunch after banding.

We returned later in the summer to replace the old camera and microphone. Since falcon Dani had fledged, the normally extremely aggressive female didn't come near us – a relief since we hadn't brought anything to capture her with! It was interesting to see just how different her behavior was. The new equipment is great and we are hoping to have it live on the internet later this year. It seems like a fitting tribute to Rob, who did so much of our early camera work.

Year falcons first nested here: 2003 | Total number of falcons produced here (2014): 34



Bob, Katie, and falcon Dani



Falcon Dani, about 28 days old

06/24/14: MN Power Hibbard Plant, Duluth MN

Adult data

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

Adult Male: N/82 Arsene, a 2008 hatch from the Castle Danger cliff in Lake County MN

Hatch data

Four eggs laid, three eggs hatched

Hatch began: 05/31/14

- 1947-20047 C/78 Female

- 1947-20048 C/79 Female
- 1156-14956 E/86 Male

Amy, the safety climbing team, and MPL employee Doug Braff went up the stack at Hibbard to band the young falcons. While Mom was a little cleaner than last year, the box was still fairly messy. We found a few hippoboscids on the young falcons, which Amy squashed. However, there weren't nearly as many as we saw here last year, or at Red Wing this year. We'll need to do some more reading on the topic, but we did clean the nest box and remove some of the detritus. Despite the bugs (which again, were not abundant) the young falcons appeared healthy and nicely developed. To read more about banding here, follow this link: <http://goo.gl/diCLJU> or watch a video here: <http://goo.gl/SxB9Wh>

Year falcons first nested here: 2009 | Total number of falcons produced here (2014): 16



Amy and Matt



Doug holds a falcon

Xcel Energy, Prairie Island, Minnesota

We were unable to get into Prairie Island to band this year, but it appears that the falcons used the old nest box on the lip of the dome. Frank Sperlak and Brian Schmidt reported that four falcons were produced. Frank wrote: *"Four babies have fledged here. Unknown sexes because we never banded them since the parents used the old nest box. All four have made it this far and it is common to see all four together. With the adults we sometimes have six flying together."*

Year falcons first nested here: 1997 | Total number of falcons produced here (2014): 53

Failed and Unproductive Sites

MPL Clay-Boswell, Cohasset, MN

Four eggs were laid at Cohasset but none of them hatched, most likely because of the cold weather. As of this writing, only one is left in the nest box. The falcons stopped incubation in mid-June, although they can still sometimes be seen visiting the site.

Xcel Energy Sherco, Becker MN

Falcons showed up in the box and laid one egg on April 14th. On April 22nd, following extremely cold weather, the female ate the first egg and laid another one. We were hopeful the site would be successful, but neither falcon incubated egg #2 and the female failed to lay more. Since the first egg laid looked sort of lumpy and white, we speculated that this nest may have failed due to the age of the resident female. However, we were not able to identify her, so we don't know for sure.

Xcel Energy King Plant, Oak Park Heights, MN

This nest failed for the second year in a row. Belinda laid a white egg on 4/16/14, which disappeared sometime on 4/19/14. She laid another white, oddly shaped egg on 4/23/14 and ate it shortly afterwards. Two normal looking eggs were laid on 4/25/14 and 4/27/14, but one disappeared. On 4/30/14, at least one new falcon showed up in the box. Fans dedicated long, hard hours to getting a band number. Skygirlblue and Nora identified the falcons as female b/r 69/W (Kris), a 2011 hatch from the Boswell Energy Center in Cohasset Minnesota, and unknown male b/r *X/unknown. Most *X males were banded in 2008. It seems a little odd that the band would have faded so quickly, and there are enough candidates that we'll need to get the bottom number before we can make a positive ID.

Diamond Bluff, Diamond Bluff WI

We initially thought the falcons were using the nest box since we saw them there several times. But after a flurry of activity at the box, they went back to the pothole they used last year. Amy rappelled down and found one addled egg. No further activity was seen this spring or summer.

Fountain City Bluff, Fountain City WI

After an absence of several years, it appeared this site would finally be successful again. Two falcons were spotted defending the cliff and spending time in the nest box. But when Dave Kester rappelled down, he found two addled eggs. No further activity was seen this summer.

Lynxville Complex, Lynxville, WI

We had an adult pair of falcons at a new cliff on the very south end of Lynxville, WI overlooking the big river. We were not able to make contact with the owners, although we talked with their neighbors. This cliff is very difficult to view from below so we don't know whether young were produced.

Wyalusing Quarry, Wyalusing, WI

We had a breeding attempt by two adult falcons at Wyalusing quarry. Unfortunately, it wasn't successful. This site has failed for four years in a row. We are going to work with the WI falconers association to mount a nest box to the quarry wall in an attempt to make it successful.

South Cliff, Waukon Junction IA

Dave Kester rappelled down to the eyrie, but it was empty. No eggs, no shells, no signs of young. Dave checked some nearby potholes, but found nothing, and volunteer Norm Caley, who lives near the site, did not see any signs of activity as the summer progressed.

Xcel Riverside, Minneapolis, MN

The heron colony was quite productive, but the falcons were not. Although two adults were on site, sterile female Mabel failed to lay eggs for the 11th year in a row.

Falcons were seen at the following sites, but there were no nesting attempts that we know of.

- **Riverview Tower**
Falcons were seen here, but they appear to have nested at the nearby Cedar-Riverside building.
- **Castle Rock**
Falcons were seen here, but they nested at Bay State Milling. We have never seen them at both sites at once. Since Bay State Milling is removing their nest box due to safety concerns, we are hopeful the falcons will return to Castle Rock.
- **Guider's Bluff**
Bob and Dave spotted falcons here once, but they were not seen again on subsequent trips.
- **Lock and Dam 9**
Maggie Jones reported falcons at Lock and Dam 9, but they failed to nest. We are working with the Wisconsin Falconers Association to have a nest box built for this cliff.
- **Trempealeau**
Several neighbors below the bluff reported falcons present until about mid-May, when they disappeared. It is possible they attempted to nest but failed.
- **Bellevue**
A pair of falcons were spotted here multiple times, but they don't appear to have nested.

Bald Eagles

Decorah Eagles

Despite sub-zero temperatures and wind chills of -40F, all three eggs in Decorah hatched. Initially, life in the nest was uneventful. But as May wore on, black flies appeared at the nest in increasing numbers. The young eaglets twitched and scratched constantly, wearing feathers from around their faces. It was almost a relief when fledge began on June 18. But relief quickly turned to worry when the fledglings appeared to vanish. In past years, they had been spotted either on cam or near the fish hatchery shortly after fledge. This year, they weren't seen until Bob received a call from the Decorah Police on June 26. A fledgling eagle had been found in the road. Bob trapped it and took it home for observation, releasing it the following day with a transmitter on its back.

That weekend, another eaglet was found in the stream very near the original nest. Bob rescued it from the stream and it was taken to SOAR for rehabilitative care. Meanwhile, Four and her brother had found a large City of Decorah mulch site about a mile from the hatchery. Both of them settled in.

On the 4th of July, Bob and Brett captured the male eagle and put a transmitter on him. Unfortunately, he didn't wear it long. He was electrocuted on July 8th by an encounter with a high-voltage distribution line. We collected his body for the National Eagle Repository and continued following Four, the only eaglet from this year's fledge still in the wild.

Bob was quite puzzled by her behavior. Although she was old enough to fledge (the eaglets fledged between 74 and 77 days of age), her behavior seemed like that of a younger eagle. She flew poorly, roosted on the ground, and continued food-begging from the mulch pile far longer than expected. He believes that the black flies were severe enough to delay development, resulting in fledglings that were not developed enough to fledge successfully despite their age.

At present time, Four has begun flying and catching fish, and SOAR is still in rehabilitative care.

Eagle Valley

We worked with Brett Mandernack, the Kohler Foundation, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to install an eagle cam at a nest on an island in the Mississippi river, at Eagle Valley. The camera revealed a slightly different set of behavior than we were used to seeing in Decorah. Among other things, we documented three adults – probably two females and a male - perched on a branch near the nest. One female vocalized as the male flew in. The male copulated with her and the other eagle flew away. They eagles spent very little time working on the nest together before the female laid eggs, and the male spent much less time on or near the nest overall. They brought less food into the nest, stored very little food in the nest, and ate almost exclusively fish and turtles.

The female laid two eggs, doing most of the incubating herself. Both eggs hatched and both parents provided food, although the female was involved in food gathering very early on in the eaglets' development. On the night of May 13, 2014, one of the eaglets was taken by a predator, most likely an owl of some sort. Although the moon was full, we don't have IR at that cam and were not able to identify what kind of owl it was.

We hoped that the remaining eaglet would reap the benefit of a better food supply. It appeared to be doing well but the black fly population exploded in late May and the remaining eaglet died on June 1st or 2nd. The body was intact and the eaglet had food in its crop and ample fat reserves, so we believe that blackflies may have played a role in its demise, possibly by clogging its airways. Unfortunately, we were not able to collect the body for necropsy.

Fort St. Vrain

The eagles at Fort St. Vrain are more similar in behavior to the eagles in Decorah than the eagles at Eagle Valley. Both adults worked on the nest. The male brought in food while the female incubated and both parents hunted and fed once the young could thermoregulate. A variety of food was brought in on a fairly regular basis, food was stored in the nest, and one of the parents was usually present while the eaglets were young.

One of the eaglets died on May 8th. It appeared to be in respiratory distress, but we were not able to recover the body to determine a cause of death. The other two eaglets fledged successfully in late June.

Kestrels

Xcel Energy, Pawnee Plant, Brush CO

Four out of five kestrel eggs hatched at Pawnee this year. One died, but the remaining three fledged around June 16th. Although this nest was successful, this is the first year we've recorded unhatched eggs and lost young.

Xcel Energy Riverside Plant, Minneapolis MN

We installed a box next to a small prairie planted on the grounds of the Riverside plant's former coal yard. It attracted a pair of kestrels this spring. We know they laid eggs, although this box does not have a cam, so we don't know how many young fledged.

Nest boxes, Decorah IA

Three of the six boxes we put up are still standing. One fell over, one was riddled with bullets and had to be removed, and one was stolen sometime last year. Of the three remaining boxes, 100% were successful. We hope to build and deploy more next year.

Other Birds

In past years, we watched barn owls and red-tailed hawks lay eggs and raise young at Eaglecrest Wildlife, located in Prather, California. Although red-tailed hawks were present this year, they failed to nest. The barn owls nested, but only one egg hatched and the young owlet, named Boo by fans, disappeared shortly before fledge. Although it is only speculation, Eaglecrest's pond is a magnet for animals and birds during California's severe prolonged drought. Could crowding and competition be contributing to nest failure?

In addition to kestrels and peregrine falcons, Xcel Energy's Riverside plant also provides a home for a great blue heron colony. We established a cam here this year and counted roughly 50 nests. Swifts finally adopted the Althea R. Sherman swift tower and can be watched at <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/swift-cam>

Once again, we saw egg-eating by a turkey vulture this year. A vulture entered the barn, prodded in the straw, uncovered an egg, and ate it. We don't know for sure when the egg was laid, however. We documented a long copulation on April 19, after the egg-eating incident, but the TV must have nested elsewhere since they were only seen a handful of times afterwards. That video can be seen here: <http://youtu.be/Eq4tjDXMn0>