

LEAVING A LEGACY...

Has watching the Decorah Eagles, the Great Spirit Bluff Falcons, or the Mississippi Flyway made a difference in your life? Supporting our peregrine falcon or golden eagle raptor research programs is an honorable gift. A legacy gift has a profound impact on how we fulfill our mission and is a tribute to your care for the wildlife, wild places, and friends you’ve come to love. We know that the excitement and joy of watching eagles and falcons raise their young can be a motivational factor to get up every day. It is humbling to know that bringing bald eagles and our other raptors to the public can have such an impact on people’s lives, friendships, and families. If you are interested in leaving a lasting legacy, contact our planned giving representative Jeff Worrell at 651-212-3026 or [jeffw@raptorresource.org](mailto:jeffw@raptorresource.org).

In memoriam

Willard Holthaus loved sharing the Decorah Eagles that nested above his garage. What a profound contribution he made to our program and Decorah Eagle fans everywhere! He was a great partner and very generous with his time and helping kick off the Decorah Eagle Livestream. He shared his garage willingly, and what a Command Central it has become! We will miss him, his smiling face, and the difference he made for eagle fans around the world.

Dave Laninga donated his time and talent to our Decorah Eagle Education Program, serving as both a chat moderator and a camera operator. As a former Army helicopter pilot, he shared common ground with the eagles in his lifetime, spending many hours hovering and soaring through the skies. He would watch the eagle cam by the hour and teach anyone willing to listen about their behavior and nesting habits. You are missed by many.

Jim Womeldorf happened to spend a good portion of his life living just north of the Decorah Eagles’ nests. When we were looking for a detailed history of where the eagles had nested or their progression of life in the hatchery valley, Jim was the person to talk to. He loved following the Decorah Eagles and helped bring them to the world by setting up a digi-scoping system in 2013 after they suddenly vacated N1 and built a new nest south of his home (N2). Thanks for your friendship and contribution to our eagle family.

ROBERT ANDERSON  
MEMORIAL  
SCHOLARSHIP



Bob at Minnesota Power's Clay Boswell Plant

The Raptor Resource Project created the Robert Anderson Memorial Scholarship Fund to honor our founder’s passion for raptors and to support students on their way to environmental conservation careers. The endowment fund is self-sustaining at this point thanks to your generous contributions! In 2022 we awarded our fourth scholarship of \$1,500 to Luther College’s Environmental Studies program. With time, we may be able to offer additional scholarships or increase the support amount. Help us grow this program. What a wonderful way to honor Bob’s lasting legacy!

The scholarship fund is managed by the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa, awarded to students at Luther College, and funded by your contributions, bequests, charitable trust remainders, and other gifts directed to the Fund. Recipients are selected for positive environmental activism, environmentally focused community involvement, or independent studies and projects related to environmentalism. To donate to the Robert Anderson Memorial Scholarship Fund, contact the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa at 319-287-9106 or go to [cfneia.org/giving/find-a-fund/712-as](https://cfneia.org/giving/find-a-fund/712-as).



Bob with Peregrine Falcon



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Raptor Resource Project News

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Falcon at Xcel High Bridge Plant

MESSAGE FROM THE  
DIRECTOR



John Howe  
RRP Director

Welcome – this year is soon coming to a close, and I can’t help but look back with a feeling of accomplishment. It has seemed like a tough couple of years, and I am ready for some R&R. You may think I’m referring to Rest & Relaxation. Yes, we can all use that, but I’m thinking about Renewal and Research. Life can be harsh in the natural world, and we have followed many recent changes and challenges that have led to opportunities for renewal and research.

Renewal: After over ten years of watching and learning from Mom and Dad Decorah—our Decorah Eagles decided to do what wild animals do—move on. Moving away from our watchful camera lenses was and still is a tough pill to swallow, but it is part of a natural progression that we can’t control. While we have been able to track them with photographs from afar, it has not been the same. That natural progression has led to an opportunity for Renewal. We shifted our focus to our eagles in the valley of the Norths—the Decorah North Nest. And then after ten years away from the famous Decorah Eagle nest known as N1, we have a new pair of

eagles entering the territory that are calling it home! What an exciting time, and I think we are very fortunate to be starting the bald eagle love story all over again. Who knows what the coming nesting season will bring? Eaglets, we hope.

Research: Regarding our raptor research, we have added an entirely new program this year monitoring and tracking the golden eagle population that winters in the Driftless Area. I’m excited to report our success in monitoring two golden eagles our first year, and I’m very proud of our team and the prospects for expanding the program in the coming year. Every day is an exciting day of data that we learn more about these powerful and mysterious

raptors. Read all about it in the Program Spotlight Section! Our peregrine falcon monitoring crew went above and beyond this year implementing fieldwork as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) entered the picture. We recorded excellent information to help assess its impact on the peregrine population with pre-nest

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



Richard and Amy at Xcel Plant

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

We would like to thank our many partners...

Landowners explore.org Xcel Energy Dairyland Power Minnesota Power	Great River Energy Red Wing Grain Ardent Milling Luther College US Bank	Winneshiek County Community Foundation Brice Prairie Conservation Association Bay State Milling	La Crosse District - Upper Mississippi River NW&FR Cornell Lab of Ornithology
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... and Donors like YOU!

SHOP OUR MERCHANDISE

Show your love for the Decorah Eagles, Decorah North Eagles, Mississippi Flyway, and Great Spirit Bluff Falcons—with our new mugs and Christmas ornaments at: [raptorresource.org/support-the-raptor-resource-project/merchandise/](https://raptorresource.org/support-the-raptor-resource-project/merchandise/) or go to our website and click ‘Shop’ at top right, next to Donate and Subscribe. In addition to RRP-created products, you will find photographic prints, books, apparel, beautiful mugs, ornaments, and notecards. All proceeds go to benefit the Raptor Resource Project. Watch our website and Facebook page for more details!





PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:  
Dairyland Power

The Raptor Resource Project has partnered with Dairyland Power since 1993 when RRP founder Bob Anderson contacted Dairyland to see if the cooperative would volunteer to help in recovery efforts for the Peregrine falcon. Dairyland Power's Alma and Genoa stacks, located between high bluffs and the Mississippi River, were the perfect spot for a falcon family and might give the species a toehold back in the river valley. Dairyland Power welcomed the plan, and a raptor neighborhood was hatched!

In March of 1994, the Raptor Resource Project and Dairyland Power installed the first falcon nest box 450 feet up the stack at Dairyland's Alma Station. It took some time for the falcons to set up house, but on Earth Day 1997, a pair of Peregrine falcons were sighted in the nest box on the Alma Station stack. Alma and Nelson produced three healthy offspring in 1997. In total, 87 peregrine falcon nestlings have fledged from the Alma stack, which makes it our most productive site to date!

Following the success at Alma, RRP and Dairyland Power installed a second nest box 375 feet up the Dairyland Genoa stack south of La Crosse, WI, in 1997. Between 1998 and the plant's closure in 2021, 70 falcons fledged from the Genoa stack. This was a very important site for us since it was our first productive site on the lower portion of the Mississippi River. Peregrine falcons would go on to nest at US Bank and several grain mills, and our 1998 and 1999 Effigy Mounds releases would eventually put falcons back on the cliffs. Peregrine falcons

Message from the Director, continued...

season monitoring, focused banding of the young, and follow-up monitoring. The good news is that we did not observe any HPAI cases and production was normal across the territory. I wish I could say the same for the owl and bald eagle populations where HPAI cases were reported to be much more prevalent. With the onset of HPAI in raptor populations, the importance of our peregrine falcon monitoring program is clear. Time will tell how lasting the effects of HPAI are and which raptor populations it circulates through. Managing and minimizing our human impact on raptor habitat in the years to come will be critical to their survival, which means that our mission of education, stewardship, and creating a lasting connection between our two worlds has never been so important.

I want to close by recognizing our partners that help us deliver our mission. Our live cams, education programs, and research would not be possible without your partnership. I'm proud of the contribution our teachers, volunteers, and conservation partners make. Thank you for supporting our programs, your interest, and your valuable contribution.



Dairyland Power nest

would go on to nest in many other places, but Peregrine nesting activity in the southern portion of the Driftless Area began here.

Dairyland Power is a steward of wildlife at their utilities and on utility land—some of the last places people might expect to find wildlife. But as Dairyland falcon and osprey cams have shown, power plants are home to a wide variety of animals. Staff put up and maintain nest boxes, track nesting activities, help us band falcons, get us to the top of cliffs and remote reservoir islands, and share their birds with their families and the wider community. We remain impressed with Dairyland Power's commitment to coexisting responsibly with wildlife and the natural habitats that surround their facilities.



Falcons at Alma

Dairyland Power's Peregrine Falcons and Ospreys can be watched from early spring through late summer. To watch, go to [dairylandpower.com/falcon-cam](https://dairylandpower.com/falcon-cam). The birds can also be watched on our website at [raptorresource.org/birdcams/dairyland-power-falcon-cams/](https://raptorresource.org/birdcams/dairyland-power-falcon-cams/).



Bob and John Thiel



Brad Foss at Genoa

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:  
Golden Eagles



We initiated a Golden Eagle research study in January of 2022 and are monitoring wintering Golden Eagles in the Driftless Area to learn more about their movement in their winter and summer ranges. We are looking at potential nest locations, seasonal migration patterns and timing, and route fidelity. Research is being conducted under the guidance and permits of RRP's Jeff Worrell, former director of the National Eagle Center, and raptor biologist Brett Mandernack. This year we trapped two Golden Eagles, one mature female and one second-year female, and fit them with satellite transmitters to learn more about these mysterious winter visitors!

Golden Eagles are one of the world's largest eagles. Shorter but heavier than Bald Eagles, adult and immature eagles are a rich chocolate brown, with feathered or 'booted' legs, a lustrous golden nape, and long black talons that look like meat hooks. They are remarkably elusive for such large birds, but a sharp observer might spot one or two in the bluffs and steeply wooded draws of the Driftless Area. We were thrilled when Jeff Worrell and Brett Mandernack proposed a Golden Eagle research project in 2021, especially since little is known about the eastern Golden Eagle population wintering in the Upper Midwest. After a year of planning to determine the transmitter type, locating trapping sites, securing lure birds, and refining our capture technique, we assembled a trapping team and went to work.

Catching Golden Eagles can be frustrating. We trap from January to early March, which means serious cold and deep snow. Golden Eagles don't care that it's -25F, those steep, icy slopes are hard to navigate in the dark, or that fingers don't work very well in the bitter cold. Jeff put a lot of detective work into finding Golden Eagles, but the species isn't especially common or predictable, so a challenging pre-dawn hike in subzero weather might be followed by a day of sitting and hoping that an eagle comes down to our net. But as we admired (and sometimes cursed) Golden Eagles high up on their rocky driftless perches, we came to a true appreciation of this amazing species: a species that lives and thrives in conditions that our fragile human selves would perish.

Setting traps is hard, but the real work begins once a Golden Eagle is in the net! Our trapping team needs to get to the site quickly and free the eagle without hurting it, losing it, or encountering its three-inch-long talons and bone-crushing grip. Once the eagle is out of the net, we hood and leash it for safety and take photos and measurements, including weight, wing chord, tail length, and tarsus thickness. We band the eagle (9 for a small male, 9C for a big female), attach the transmitter, and release it where we caught it. At that point, data collection takes over! We use a tracking device that can connect with cellphone towers or satellites, which results in a remarkably rich data set. We know our eagles' locations, speed, altitude, activity levels, external temperatures, battery information, and area weather information.

What did their summers look like? Both of our eagles wintered in the Driftless Area, flying north in April and May, respectively. Both summered above the arctic circle about 1600 miles north of their wintering grounds, although the adult summered further north than her immature counterpart. As if their massive feet, adaptability, hardiness, and intelligence weren't enough, they were remarkably fast for such large birds! We documented them traveling over 200 miles in a single day, maintaining an average speed of 33 miles per hour for six hours straight, flying at elevations of over 5,000 feet, and stooping at speeds of 90 miles per hour! Ryan Schmitz also made some important connections with local people, so we have context for their lives in Nunavut: what they might be eating, what their habitat looks like, what else people are seeing, and how they survive in the rugged yet lovely environment above the arctic circle.

As of this writing, the immature female eagle is back. We have transmitters to deploy and look forward to learning more about these beautiful and enigmatic eagles. If you'd like to learn more about the eagles, visit our Golden Eagle page at [raptorresource.org/learning-tools/golden-eagles/](https://raptorresource.org/learning-tools/golden-eagles/). To read John's eagle trapping account, follow this link: [raptorresource.org/2022/03/22/golden-eagle-trapping-in-the-driftless/](https://raptorresource.org/2022/03/22/golden-eagle-trapping-in-the-driftless/).

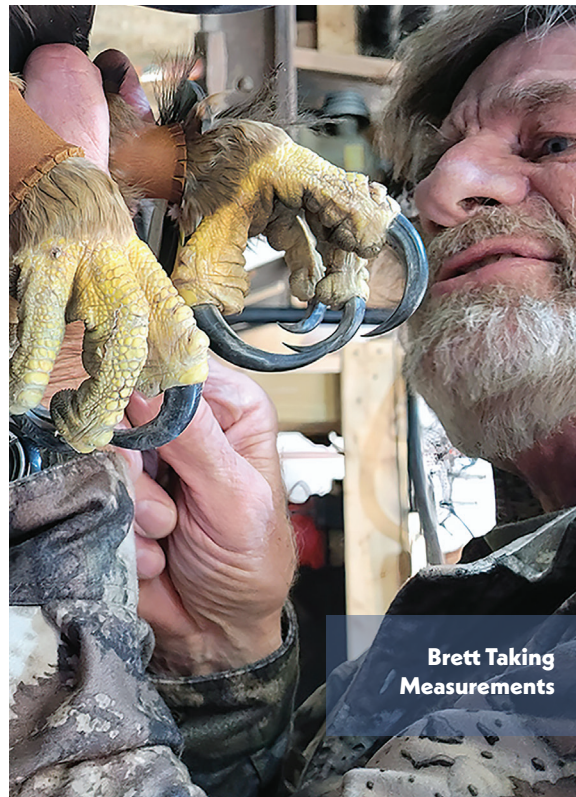


Halux Measurement



Jeff with Golden Eagle

We need more eyes in the sky for our Driftless Golden Eagle program. If you see Golden Eagles or believe you have them on your land in the Driftless area of Wisconsin, Minnesota, or Iowa, please contact Amy Ries at [amy@raptorresource.org](mailto:amy@raptorresource.org), or text 621-237-5793. We would love to learn more!



Brett Taking Measurements