



Decorah Bald Eagles

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



John Howe
RRP Director

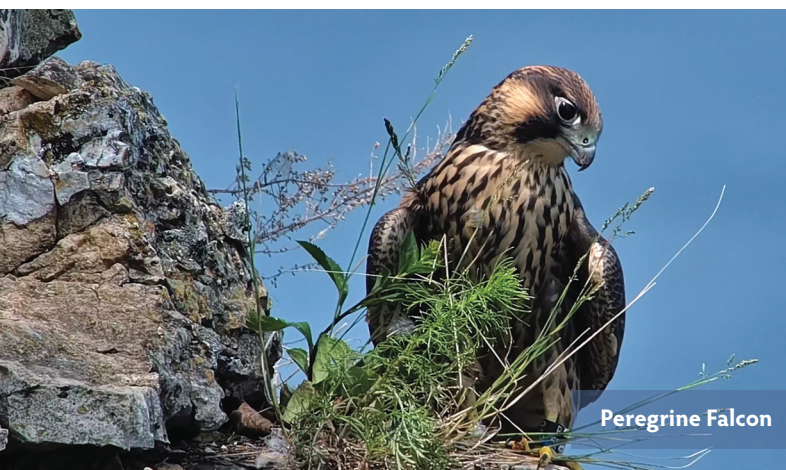
I'm pleased to present this Raptor Resource Project newsletter. It has been a remarkable year, and I encourage you to take some time to look at our annual report, which can be found here: [raptorresource.org/raptorresource/pdf/2023BandingReport.pdf](https://www.raptorresource.org/raptorresource/pdf/2023BandingReport.pdf)

We live in a unique era where some of the fundamental forces driving raptor behavior are in flux. Climate change is influencing seasonal transitions, including egg-laying and migration timing with the Peregrine Falcons we monitor. Our research is also opening a window into the far-reaching effects of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), which is fatal to most raptors. Long-term monitoring programs like ours are important since they help us understand stresses on raptor populations and how they impact

behavior and health. Despite the challenges posed by climate change and avian influenza, we banded a record 81 peregrine falcons this year. We monitor impacts on the peregrine falcon population with pre-nest season surveys, focused banding of young, and follow-up monitoring. We expanded our field research programs this year to collect bodily fluid and blood samples for HPAI analysis by The Raptor Center and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Monitoring the health and well-being of raptors is challenging in this time of change, but time and careful research will reveal how lasting the effects of HPAI will be and perhaps give us tools to fight it.

Opportunities arise in the wondrous world of Bald Eagles in Decorah, IA. We were treated to a season like no other with the first nesting of Hatchery Mom and Hatchery Dad in a starter nest that we rebuilt in the fall of 2021; the remarkable survival of their second nestling DH2; a micro-burst storm that nearly took down the nest tree; and a successful fledge. We also monitored the unsuccessful nesting season of Mom Decorah and her mate DM2 in new nest N4 along the Upper Iowa River. At the Decorah North Nest, we observed an atypical nesting season when resident female DNF laid one egg instead of her usual two. We believe we witnessed the results of a nesting female exhibiting territorial behavior. DNF did her best to keep intruder adult eagles away while Mr. North did

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



Peregrine Falcon



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: Philippine Eagle Foundation

Photos by Kike Arnal

We are excited to assist the Philippine Eagle Conservation Foundation (PEF) with its mission to save their beloved eagle. That is a monumental task, and the dedicated PEF staff have been at work for over 35 years, securing its future. The Philippine eagle is critically endangered and one of the largest and rarest eagles on earth. Fewer than 900 eagles remain on four Philippine islands. This eagle, the Philippines' national bird, has been in decline primarily from habitat loss and poaching, both consequences of human population growth. The non-profit PEF works tirelessly to preserve habitat for the wild population, educating the Filipino public, conducting vital research, and breeding healthy Philippine eagles for release into the wild.

Many of you may remember back in 2013 when Bob Anderson helped PEF staff set up the first live-streaming webcam to showcase a young Philippine eaglet that was being raised at the organization's breeding facility. That year, raptor fans were amazed to watch Mabuhay grow and thrive. She is now one of the breeding females at the facility. Bob and RRP board member Neil Rettig were captivated by the eagle's plight and worked with the PEF, raising public awareness and supporting the PEF in



PEF Staff with Eagle

drawing attention and support to their cause. The 2018 release of the movie *Bird of Prey* provided a rare and unmatched view into the plight of the bird and the intimate details of its nesting in the wild.

Much like the amazing public education and love story created by the Decorah Eagle Live Cam in 2011, we hope 2024 is the year that the Philippine eagle is introduced to the world in all its majesty with a new live-streaming camera. The Raptor Resource Project is proud to play a part in helping the PEF succeed in its mission. Long may the Philippine eagle fly!



Philippine Eaglet Being Fed

Message from the Director, continued...

his best to incubate his precious egg to hatch. Unfortunately, he couldn't incubate the egg by himself, and it froze and cracked. We hope for a more normal nesting season in 2024.

Our Golden Eagle monitoring and tracking program expanded in 2023 with the addition of five more eagles wintering in the Driftless area. We have assembled a team to trap and transmit at least four more adult Golden Eagles in 2024. Our Golden Eagle partners spent the summer in Nunavut, Canada, near Hudson Bay and the Northwest Passage! Every day is an exciting day as we learn more about these powerful and mysterious raptors.

I love the wide-ranging coverage of our raptor education programs that span from kindergarten to college students. Our collaborative, hands-on raptor monitoring station with Luther College has expanded to the Mississippi River, and

two stations have provided double the access for training and research, giving high school and college students the unique experience of holding a live raptor, examining and studying it, and releasing it to the wild. In the classroom, our Education-in-Action program is used by teachers across the country and around the globe! Our future leaders in raptor conservation surround us. Each class of students we introduce to life in an eagle nest or the beauty of a buteo moves us along in our goal of engaging and developing our future conservationists. We are truly meeting our mission of education, conservation, and research. A heartfelt thanks to our volunteer moderators, cam operators, videographers, partners, and donors. Our live streams, education programs, and research would not be possible without you. Here's to an exciting year of raptor research and discovery in 2024!

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Luther College Banding Station

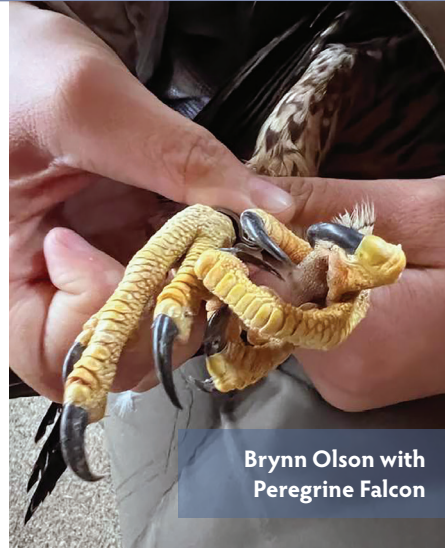
The hawk had caught me. It was never the other way around.
—Helen Macdonald, *H Is for Hawk*

For a few weeks each fall, a handful of Luther interns experience pure magic.

“The awe never really goes away,” says Mary McTeague '22. “Whenever I handle a hawk, I’m struck by both their beauty and their strength.” Brynn Olsen '23, an environmental studies major, agrees. “You’re holding a wild raptor—it never gets old.” Luther College students like Olsen work with the Raptor Resource Project to band migrating raptors, growing our body of knowledge about how these birds live and move in a changing world. McTeague and Olsen are two of six Luther interns employed by RRP each year to help trap and band raptors as they migrate south. Their work contributes to a larger body of knowledge that tracks bird populations, dispersal, migration, health, life history, and survival rates.

Luther has partnered with RRP since 2017. The Hawk Hill station, funded through RRP and a grant from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, is situated in the northwest corner of campus on a hilltop prairie peppered with stands of cedar and aspen. In its six years of operation, interns at the station have banded hundreds of birds and shared the splendor of live raptors with just as many area students. Luther classes and homeschooled children regularly visit the blind, and Kester will often take a live hawk from the station down to campus to show Luther bio students or to Decorah schools like John Cline Elementary. In this way, the Hawk Hill station acts as an incubator for future bird conservationists, whose early encounters with these wild animals will hopefully breed a lifelong interest.

In the Western Hemisphere, researchers from Canada to South America work together to understand bird populations, and one way they do this is through banding—carefully trapping wild birds, recording information about them, then attaching a metal band with a unique serial number around their legs. In the US, these bands are issued by the United States Geological Survey (USGS). When a banded bird is recaptured or found dead or injured, the USGS and the researchers who applied the band are informed.



Brynn Olson with
Peregrine Falcon

The setup at the Hawk Hill station typically includes three nets and multiple lures to attract raptors. Kester trains interns on how to work the traps, collect hawks from the nets, and take a variety of measurements from weight to wing cord to tail length, all in a way that is safe for both bird and handler. The interns choose a band

and fit it around the raptor’s leg. Under that band’s unique serial number, interns record the data they measured and release the bird.

With only about 2,000 master banders in the US, Luther students are lucky to have access to local experts like Kester and Jon Stravers and the mentorship they offer. Olsen, who hopes to work in raptor research longer-term, says, “It’s nice to have people behind me who know areas that I might be able to go into. I’ve been very fortunate to work with Dave and Jon—they’ve taught me a lot.”



Brynn Olson with
Peregrine Falcon

TEACHER'S CORNER...

The Raptor Resource Project is dedicated to helping birds of prey thrive through conservation, education, and raptor-focused research. As part of our mission, we offer educational programs and opportunities free of charge to



Dave Kester Teaches
Luther College Students

As far as Kester is concerned, it's about the students. "When we first started this program, I wanted nothing more than to trap hawks," he said. "But the experience of working with Luther students is my favorite part now. I'm helping to create the next generation of conservationists: the people who will succeed us and carry on our work. They are thirsty for knowledge,

bright, dedicated, and just plain fun! If they are an example of the young people coming up behind us, we're going to be OK."

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Dave Kester with Environmental Philosophy Class



Janet, Abigail, and Mara with Red-Tailed Hawk

educators, families, and community groups. Take a look below to see if any of them work for you.

Remote Teaching and Classroom Visits

John Howe or Amy Ries can remotely visit a classroom to talk about Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, or Raptors in general. We can also deliver a program called "What Makes a Raptor a Raptor?" using materials we'll loan to you for a hybrid remote/local experience. Classroom visits by RRP volunteers are also an option for nearby classrooms (Minnesota/Iowa & Wisconsin).

Banding Station Visits

Our autumn banding stations in Decorah, Iowa, and Wyalusing, Wisconsin, usually operate from mid-September through early December. Reach out to schedule a visit with Dave Kester. We can take small groups of up to five people.

Educational Chat

We offer an educational chat and resources on our website [raptorresource.org/classroom/](https://www.raptorresource.org/classroom/). We invite teachers, including homeschooling parents and groups, to sign up for an account. Our chat usually runs from February through April.

Educational Videos

We are currently working on a series of educational videos. The first, How We Get To An Eagle's Nest, can be viewed on our YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/hB1O-sk0o5k?si=b9BH8ADm92JkvcJs>. We'll be releasing more soon!

To schedule a remote or banding station visit, please contact Amy Ries at amy@raptorresource.org.



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.

In memoriam

Dee Wisdom donated her time and talent to our Decorah Eagle Education Program serving as lead chat moderator in the early days, moderator, and event organizer. She was a super fan of the Decorah Eagles and would watch the eagle cam by the hour and teach anyone willing to listen about their behavior and nesting habits. She also loved moderating in the Mississippi Flyway chat group. Dee will be missed by many.

How To Donate to the Raptor Resource Project

Your tax-deductible donation helps keep cameras streaming, pay for satellite transmitters and data, support our banding work with nestling peregrine falcons in spring and migrating raptors in fall, and help us get the word out about habitat and laws that protect birds of prey and the world around them.

To make your donation process quick and convenient, we have included a QR code. Simply scan it with your smartphone's camera, and it will direct you to our secure donation page. Thank you so much for your support—for watching, for sharing, for learning, and especially for caring! We couldn't do what we do without you.



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 2023, we awarded our fifth 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



Bob with Peregrine Falcon

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 cfnea.org/giving/find-a-fund/712-as.



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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/ 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!

