



Decorah North Nest Eagle

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



John Howe
RRP Director

It is my pleasure to present the Raptor Resource Project's Winter Newsletter! This year, the predominant theme has been the normalization of extreme weather events throughout the areas we monitor. The good news is that the Bald Eagles, falcons, and other raptors we work with appear to have hardly a feather out of place. Their ability to seek shelter and hunker down during storms is a testament to their incredible resilience. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for our equipment and nest support structures. High winds and sustained heavy rains took their toll on cameras, power panels, and nests. However, thanks to thoughtful evaluation, dedicated work, and extensive repairs, we are ready to continue monitoring and celebrating these remarkable birds as they enter the upcoming nesting season.

I believe our long-term Peregrine Falcon monitoring program is critical as we gain an understanding of changing weather patterns



John with Peregrine Falcon

and disease vectors, and their effect on raptor populations. We have been documenting migration timing, egg laying, hatching, and post-fledge success along the Mississippi Flyway since 2000. To date, we have not noticed a significant decline in Peregrine Falcon nest occupancy. In addition to nest occupancy, we monitor adult changeover/replacement at each location. In 2024, we identified four sites where changeovers occurred and two where they likely occurred. This is well within historical norms and reassuring, given initial concerns about potentially higher losses of nesting peregrines in coastal areas of the U.S. Despite these challenges, we banded 81 Peregrine Falcons this year, tying our record. As far as we know, peregrine losses attributable to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) were limited to one adult this nesting season.

Our nest cam program is a vital part of our raptor monitoring and public education efforts. This year, we witnessed an unsuccessful nesting season for Hatchery Dad and Hatchery Mom at their new nest near the Decorah Fish Hatchery. However, the loss of close-up views there was balanced by a wonderful season at the Decorah North Nest. Mr. North and DNF successfully hatched and raised two eaglets, DN17 and DN18, before an extremely wet and windy season brought the nest down. Thankfully, the eaglets had fledged before the collapse. We also celebrated successes at other nests. Mom Decorah and DM2 welcomed their 40th eaglet, D40, at N4

Message from the Director, continued inside...

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:

Partnering for Conservation

Raptor Resource Project and Xcel Energy

For over three decades, the Raptor Resource Project (RRP) has been dedicated to protecting raptors and their habitats. One of our most impactful initiatives began with Xcel Energy—a partnership that has helped Peregrine Falcons, once on the brink of extinction, flourish.

The story began in 1989 when an Xcel Energy employee spotted a rare Peregrine Falcon at the Allen S. King plant in Oak Park Heights, Minnesota. Plant staff teamed up with RRP to build and install a nest box, which attracted a young



falcon named *Mae*. In 1990, *Mae* fostered two Peregrine Falcon nestlings: an event of major significance, since with the “class” of 1990, the total number of peregrines produced or augmented across the Midwestern United States and Canada consisted of just 30 falcons. Since then, 474 falcons have

been produced at eight Xcel Energy sites in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Xcel alumni include *Princess*, the oldest known breeding Peregrine Falcon in the Midwest; *Mel*, who was ID'd in Cancun, Mexico, 1,660 miles south of his natal nest; and *Smoke* and *Prescott*, two young peregrines followed by a classroom in Seattle, and one of the earliest examples of remote learning connecting students to wildlife in real-time.



The successful nesting effort at the Allen S. King plant ignited a groundbreaking nest box and bird cam program that has

Lynn at Ashland, Wisconsin facility



been embraced by utilities worldwide. What began as a local partnership to install nest boxes evolved into a far-reaching conservation initiative, exploring the ways in which power plants—an unexpected source of habitat—could support birds of prey and help them thrive.

From Nest Boxes to Bird Cams: Innovating Conservation

In 1997, RRP and Xcel Energy launched their first bird cam, “Mae’s Internet,” at the Allen S. King plant. The live stream was an overnight sensation, briefly making Xcel Energy’s website the busiest corporate site in the world. Building on this success, the program quickly expanded to include cams at Xcel Energy’s Fort St. Vrain plant in Colorado, the Pawnee plant in Brush, Colorado, and the Riverside plant in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

This initiative culminated in the world-famous Decorah Eagle Cam, which Xcel Energy hosted during its debut year in 2008. Since then, the bird cam program has inspired a new generation of birdwatchers, researchers, and conservationists while raising awareness of the challenges raptors face.

Building a Legacy Together

The Raptor Resource Project’s partnership with Xcel Energy is a wonderful example of how conservation organizations and businesses can collaborate to protect wildlife and ecosystems. Together, we’ve created habitats, mitigated threats, and ensured that future generations can marvel at these remarkable birds of prey.

Watch the Cams

To watch Xcel Energy’s Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, Kestrels, and Great Blue Herons, visit our website at raptorresource.org/birdcams/xcel-energy-cams/. You can also find them on Xcel Energy’s website or YouTube. Thanks to Xcel Energy for all they’ve done to support the Peregrine Falcon!



Message from the Director, continued from cover...



along the Upper Iowa River—a remarkable milestone! On the Wisconsin side of the Mississippi River, Mr. and Mrs. T fledged two eaglets at a

nest in Trempealeau, Wisconsin. Meanwhile, at Xcel Energy's Ft. St. Vrain nest, we reached an incredible milestone with the hatch and fledge of FSV49 and FSV50, marking 50 eaglets since our first live-streaming eagle cam began in 2003. Additionally, we partnered with the Philippine Eagle Foundation to launch a network of live cams aimed at raising awareness of and fostering appreciation for the endangered Philippine Eagle, extending our reach globally. We made good progress with our Golden Eagle monitoring and tracking program in 2024 with the addition of five more eagles. We now have tracking and migration data for 12 Golden Eagles wintering in the Driftless Area and have assembled a team to trap and transmit up to seven more adult Golden Eagles in 2025. Our Golden Eagle partners gave us a wonderful glimpse of their nesting territory in the extreme north of Nunavut, Canada, near Hudson Bay and the Northwest Passage. To learn more about them, follow us on social, subscribe to our blog, and check out our interactive Bald and Golden Eagle maps: raptorresource.org/learning-tools/eagle-map/.

I'm thrilled by the wide reach of our raptor education programs, which engage learners from kindergarten through college. These programs include two hands-on raptor monitoring stations near Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, and Wyalusing State Park in Wisconsin; raptor ambassador visits to schools and STEM events in northwest Iowa; and an Education-in-Action chat with downloadable resources utilized by teachers nationwide and around the world. Our live cameras provide education and enjoyment. Tune into News from Nature and find wonder in every wingbeat!

We continue to deliver 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 2025!

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Advancing Raptor Conservation

Raptor Resource Project's 2024 Research Highlights

The Raptor Resource Project (RRP) has long been at the forefront of raptor conservation and research, and 2024 has been no exception. This year, our work spanned critical initiatives aimed at understanding and protecting birds of prey. From tracking the movements of Golden Eagles to documenting changes in migration patterns, our efforts continued to deepen our understanding of raptors and their role in the environment.

Golden Eagle Tracking: Transmitters Unveil New Insights



Amy and John – Banding at Red Wing Grain

In 2024, RRP successfully fitted transmitters on five Golden Eagles (GOEA), expanding our efforts to track and study these magnificent birds. Our transmitters provide invaluable

data on eagle movements, migration patterns, and habitat use. By analyzing this information, we gain a better understanding of how these eagles interact with their environment.

Golden Eagles are an iconic yet vulnerable species, and this project is part of a broader effort to identify key habitats and migration corridors critical to their survival. Our tracking data has already started to inform conservation strategies and enables us to work more effectively with land managers and policymakers.

Peregrine Falcon Banding: Continuing a Legacy

This year, RRP banded 81 Peregrine Falcons, marking another milestone in our long-standing commitment to studying this once-endangered species. Banding allows us to monitor the movements and population health



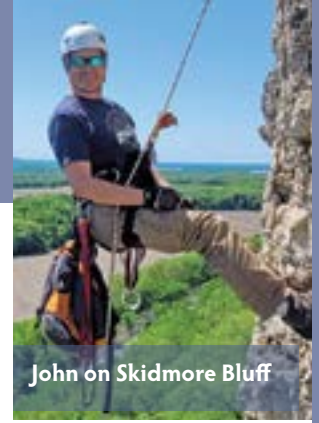
Brett Measuring Golden Eagle



John and Janet – Banding in Lansing, Iowa



Golden Eagle Tail for age ID



John on Skidmore Bluff

of these incredible birds, providing crucial data on their nesting success, survival rates, and dispersal patterns.

Each band tells a story. Our Peregrine Falcons have been identified as far away as Cancun to the south and Assateague Island to the east, illustrating the incredible journeys these raptors undertake. The data collected from this year's banding efforts will contribute to ongoing research that helps ensure peregrines continue to thrive.

Internships and Migration Studies: Educating the Next Generation

Our partnership with Luther College and the University of Wisconsin-Platteville has brought fresh perspectives and energy to our work. In 2024, eight dedicated interns joined our team to help band 100 migratory raptors and collect data on raptor migration chronology. They worked alongside our researchers to observe changes in the timing and patterns of migration—a key indicator of how climate change and habitat shifts are affecting bird populations. Species like Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, and Northern Harriers were among those banded this year. The hands-on experience provided interns with valuable fieldwork skills and fostered their passion for conservation, ensuring that the next generation of scientists is equipped to tackle future challenges.

The data gathered on raptor migration chronology is crucial for understanding long-term trends. By comparing this year's findings with historical records, we can track shifts in migration timing, identify emerging threats, and develop strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change on raptors.

Golden Eagle Blood Sampling: Unlocking Hidden Data

A major highlight of our 2024 research was the collection of blood samples from Golden Eagles. These samples are being analyzed for three critical areas:

HPAI (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza): With outbreaks of avian flu posing significant risks to bird populations, testing for HPAI helps us understand the prevalence and impact of this disease among Golden Eagles.

Heavy Metals: Testing for heavy metals like lead and mercury provides insight into environmental contamination and its effects on eagle health and reproduction.

Genetics: Genetic analysis helps uncover population structure, breeding dynamics, and migration patterns, offering a deeper understanding of Golden Eagle ecology. These samples are an essential part of our efforts to assess



Dave and Rachel – sampling for HPAI

the overall health of Golden Eagle populations and address emerging threats. The findings will not only inform our work but also contribute to a growing body of knowledge shared with the broader conservation community.

Looking Ahead: Building on 2024's Success

As 2024 comes to a close, the Raptor Resource Project is proud of the progress made in our research and conservation efforts. Each initiative this year has brought us closer to understanding the challenges raptors face and the strategies needed to protect them. By combining cutting-edge technology, traditional banding methods, and the enthusiasm of the next generation of conservationists, we are forging a path toward a brighter future for raptors.



Perigrine Falcon at Twin Bluff

The work we've accomplished in 2024 is a testament to the power of collaboration and innovation. Together with our interns, partners, and supporters, the Raptor Resource Project remains committed to safeguarding the incredible birds that inspire and connect us to the natural world.

LEAVING A LEGACY...



Has watching the Decorah Eagles, the Great Spirit Bluff Falcons, or the Mississippi Flyway inspired you? Your support for our Peregrine Falcon and Golden Eagle research programs can help ensure these raptors thrive for generations to come. A legacy gift creates a lasting impact, helping us carry out our mission and protect the wildlife, wild places, and communities you care about. The joy of watching eagles and falcons raise their young is a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving these majestic birds for the future. By contributing to their continued survival, you leave a legacy that will inspire future generations. If you're interested in making a lasting difference, talk to your attorney about making a gift in your will or living trust and please let us know that you are interested.

In Memoriam

Michelle Schnapp served as an RRP moderator for many years. She was an avid eagle fan since the beginning—what you would call a super fan of the Decorah Eagles. Pyrum, as chatters knew her, would watch the eagle cam daily and loved teaching young and old about Mom and Dad Decorah. We were proud to accept her legacy gift to the Raptor Resource Project! She will be missed by many.

George Howe had a special place in his heart for raptors—Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, and Red Tail Hawks were his favorites. His passion grew from teaching students about the Peregrine Falcons on the family property (Great Spirit Bluff) to stewarding many land conservation projects along the Mississippi River bluffs. He co-produced two Emmy-winning movies about the Driftless Area: *Mysteries of the Driftless* and *Decoding the Driftless*, with a third movie in production at the time of his passing. He will be greatly missed.

How To Donate to the Raptor Resource Project

Your tax-deductible donation keeps cameras streaming, funds satellite transmitters and data collection, supports our banding efforts with nestling Peregrine Falcons in the spring and migrating raptors in the fall, and advances the conservation and research work that protects birds of prey and their habitats. Your participation by watching, sharing, learning, and caring makes all the difference. We couldn't do this without you.

To donate, simply scan the QR code below with your smartphone's camera to access our secure donation page. You can also use the enclosed envelope. Thank you for your support!



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 2024, we awarded our sixth 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

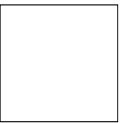


Bob with Peregrine Falcon

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 cfneia.org/robert-anderson-scholarship.



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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!

