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Peregrine falcons again nesting at Dubuque County Courthouse

BY ALICIA YAGER alicia.yager@thmedia.com 6 hrs ago



A male peregrine falcon stares into a fixed camera at the Dubuque County Courthouse recently. The falcons have returned to nest on the ledges of the historic building. Contributed

The Dubuque County Courthouse is again home to a nesting pair of peregrine falcons.

Last week, the female falcon laid two red eggs in a pea gravel nest set up by Dubuque County Conservation staff. Conservation Executive Director Brian Preston is hopeful the parents will be able to successfully hatch more than one egg this year.

"They're a little more experienced parents this year, they should be able to handle two to three young," he said.

The public can watch the young family through a live webcam established by the county's information technology staff. IT Superintendent Nathan Gilmore said there were more than 280 subscribers to the feed as of Friday.

"Several people who watched it last year said they're so happy it's back online," he said.

Two years ago, Gilmore said, county staff noticed some very noisy birds hanging around the fifth floor of the courthouse. The source was a pair of peregrine falcons who had laid two eggs on a high ledge. Preston said peregrine falcons generally lay their eggs on high cliffs, rather than a traditional nest.

Unfortunately, the eggs were blown off the ledge by the wind, and Preston and his staff quickly put a wooden box filled with pea gravel on the ledge to tempt the falcons back. While they returned, they didn't lay any more eggs in 2016.

The pair came back in 2017 and successfully hatched one of their three eggs, a young female.

Preston said the male falcon picks the nesting site, and he seems to like the courthouse.

This year, the falcons will have to deal with crews re-roofing the courthouse. Preston said there's no way to shield the nest from that work, and the \$1.2 million project needs to get done.

"Once they lay eggs, they're not as apt to leave or abandon the nest," he said.

Gilmore said they re-positioned the live camera a little to the left to see more of the ledge next to the nest. He said video commenters have dubbed that area the "Around The Corner Cafe," since the parents ate prey there a lot.

He added there has been talk of adding another live camera to give another perspective of the nest.

Gilmore said viewers can tell the two birds apart by the female being larger. The male also has research bands on his legs.

The Youtube live stream of the nest can be viewed at https://bit.ly/2qfBJTA.

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