

# We Energies Peregrine Falcon Winter Update

Jan. 6, 2009

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## Oak Creek Power Plant

### They're Back! Great Horned Owls Return

It looks like we're in for another interesting and challenging nesting season at OCPP this year. On the morning of Dec. 30, the 8 a.m. webcam image from this site showed a great horned owl huddled in the back corner of the peregrine nest box – the very same location where the owls nested last year. This first sighting is even earlier than last year's date of Jan. 4.

On Jan. 2, Rose Dehli and I visited the nest box and found both adult owls inside. We also found one egg, which is a week earlier than last year when Bob Meidl spotted the first egg on Jan. 8. Egg(s) should begin hatching here around the first week of February. Both the owl and peregrine nest boxes were cleaned Nov. 1.

### Wisconsin Great Horned Owl Facts

**Status:** Common resident statewide.

**Habitat:** Highly variable - deciduous forest, northern hemlock-pine forests, open landscapes, woodlots, agricultural lands with 15-50% tree cover, urban settings.

**Nests:** Great horned owls do not build or repair their nests and instead use whatever large stick structure is available, such as previously used nests of red-tailed hawks, crows and great blue herons. They also nest in hollow trees, on rock faces and on/in human-built structures.

**Eggs:** 1-4 eggs are laid and incubation is 30-37 days.

**Breeding Data:** Nest with egg(s) Jan. 20 to April 8.

**Note:** New early egg laying record of Jan. 2 at the Oak Creek Power Plant nest site.



**Above:** The adult male great horned owl and the first egg photographed through peepholes in the nest box.

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## Pleasant Prairie Power Plant

### Duke, Resident Male Found Dead

On Dec. 23, I received a call from Bob Reske about a dead falcon found at this site. The falcon was found frozen had been dead for an undetermined amount of time. When I picked it up and read the band numbers, I discovered it was “Duke” (b/r) 1/\*P, the resident adult male at this site since 1999. Since the cause of death is unknown, the carcass will be sent to Madison for a necropsy.

Duke was one of three young produced in 1998 at Milwaukee’s Landmark on the Lake nest site. He arrived at Pleasant Prairie Power Plant in 1999. His arrival was remarkable.



*Duke, pictured above nested at P4 from 1999 – 2008 fathering a total of 32 young.*

The following are my field notes from April 10, 1999, the day we realized a new male had taken over this site.

*“Went up the stack here today with Bob Reske and found a dead, partially-eaten, adult male peregrine in the nest box. It is unbanded, and I’m assuming that it is the same male that has nested at this site since it first became active in 1998. This particular male was quite tame and regularly sat 10 feet from me on the catwalk railing. On the contrary, the new male we found here today would not come in close at all! Couldn’t tell if he was banded or not.”*

A likely scenario was that Duke battled with and killed the resident male at this site that spring. Although territorial battles at nest sites are fairly common, they seldom end up in the death of a falcon. Duke was one of the wariest males I’d observed and over the ensuing years never gave me an opportunity to make a positive ID either staying in flight or perching too far away to read his bands. It wasn’t until 2006 when the peregrines nested in the box in the new chimney at this site that I was finally able to get a positive ID using an enlarged digital image I took through a peephole in the back of the nest box.

With Duke gone, our hope is that a new male will take up residence here before spring. Recent webcam images from the nest box have shown a female I believe is “Breezer” (Duke’s mate) perched inside. Pleasant Prairie Power Plant was always the earliest nest we knew of in Wisconsin to have eggs with the first egg laid on March 13 last year. Since this successful long-term pairing has now come to an end, it is unlikely we’ll see such an early egg date here again.

The nest box at this site was cleaned Nov. 18.

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## Milwaukee Valley Power Plant

After an unsuccessful nesting attempt at this site last season, things quieted down over the summer. The last time a pair of peregrines was seen here was Aug. 11 (see webcam image below left). On Nov. 18, with the assistance of Bill Holton and Bob Matyas, the nest box was cleaned and readied for spring. During our time on the chimney, we never saw a peregrine.

One thing we did notice, however, was a vibration coming from the chimney that had not been present during the nesting season. Whether this could cause a problem with nesting is uncertain, but Bill Holton is looking into the matter and may be able to eliminate or reduce this.



**Above:** Before and after cleaning images of the nest box at VAPP. Note the pair of falcons present here on Aug. 11.

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## Port Washington Generating Station

The nest box at this site was cleaned Nov. 1. While I was working, the adult female peregrine showed up, made several fly bys, and then perched on the chimney above me.



**Above:** Before and after cleaning images of the nest box at PWGS.

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## Presque Isle Power Plant, Michigan

Webcam images from this site last showed a peregrine present in August, but according to Sue Schenk-Drobny and Scot Stewart, there have been no sightings since. Schenk-Drobny and Greg Labonte cleaned the nest box in December and reported a lot of pigeon droppings in the back of the box.

Let's keep our fingers crossed that a pair of peregrines will take up residence here this spring and produce young.

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## Milwaukee County Power Plant

So far, there has been no observed activity at this site. The new webcam should be running before the nesting season, which will allow us more opportunities for monitoring. A pair of peregrines was present during the summer at the north tower of the Mayfair Mall, which is just north and a bit west of MCPP, so there are peregrines in the area.

For additional information on the Peregrine Falcon Recovery Program, contact:  
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