

ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT

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44 Pages

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Paintings at Arts Walk

• Visitors to the Middlebury Arts Walk can see work by TJ Cunningham and Catchi Childs. See Pages 34 and 44.



New brew house to double capacity

• Otter Creek Brewing looks to become the biggest maker of beer in Vermont. See Page 2.

Weekend packed with big games

• Tiger football was looking to stay unbeaten, while Eagle field hockey hosted a Metro foe. See that and more, Pages 29-31.



Exploring the power of play

• Play is important for both kids and adults. Read about it and more in our Health & Well-being section on Pages 17-28.

Falcons back from the brink

Record tally of peregrine chicks counted

By GAEN MURPHREE

ADDISON COUNTY — Forty-five years ago, a lone male peregrine falcon spotted at Mt. Pisgah above Lake Willoughby was the last wild falcon left in Vermont. The last. The entire species had been wiped out

(technically “extirpated,” not extinct), not only in Vermont, not only in the Northeast, but throughout its entire range east of the Mississippi.

This year, state wildlife biologists reported 44 cliff-nesting pairs producing a record 67 chicks — several

in Addison County.

“It’s tremendous just to have them back,” said Sue Staats, a biological technician with the National Forest Service who monitors peregrines in the Middlebury and Rochester ranger districts.

While the peregrine population is (See *Falcons*, Page 16)



Photo credit: Peter Larsen



Hearth work

SIMHA BODE WORKS with Ripton Elementary School fifth- and sixth-graders Alyza Alger, left, Maggie Christner, Elise Heppell and Phoebe Hussey to build a pizza oven behind the school last Thursday afternoon. Bode taught students the finer points of building a wood-fired oven during a two-day workshop.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

Down the drain

Street stencil reminds us that waste goes to lake

By GAEN MURPHREE

BRISTOL — As merrymakers began arriving for the Bristol Harvest Festival on Saturday, Sept. 26, a group of 14 volunteers with the New Haven River Anglers Association fanned out along Bristol streets on a serious mission.

In groups of twos and threes they stopped at storm drains in the village center, laid down a stencil, and

printed a message for anyone who deposits waste — fluids and solids — into the gutters:

“Keep It Clean, Drains To River.” The stencils, with the text accompanied by the image of a trout, are to remind Bristol residents to protect the New Haven River, as it drains into Otter Creek and eventually into Lake Champlain.

(See *Anglers*, Page 43)

New judge takes bench at Addison County Courthouse

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — The regular changing of the guard within Vermont’s local courthouses has brought a new presiding judge to Addison County — Samuel Hoar Jr., who replaces Judge Robert Mello, who has been transferred to Franklin County

Superior Court.

Addison County’s new judge hopes to be spending the next two years in Addison County’s courthouse, and he does not mind getting a change of scenery on a regular basis.

“Overall, I favor the concept of (See *Judge Hoar*, Page 14)



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Falcons

(Continued from Page 1)

still a far cry from the 350 pairs the Vermont Center for Ecostudies estimates were in Vermont in the 1940s, the peregrine's steady increase since coming off the federal Endangered Species list in 1999 and the Vermont Endangered Species List in 2005 is considered a resounding success, albeit one tinged with cautious optimism.

"Humans have admired peregrine falcons for thousands of years," said John Buck, Nongame Bird Project leader at the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. "I think it has to do with the speed and agility with which they fly (up to 200 mph). They're like fighter jets. They're not a very big bird either, so seeing something of that size that's that fast and that skilled, I think there's just great admiration for individuals that can excel like that."

Today's Vermont peregrines are descended from chicks hand raised on cliff sites by wildlife experts from 1982 to 1987, and then released into the wild. The first

pair of falcons returned to Vermont on their own in 1984. Those first hand-reared chicks had to be obtained from falconry enthusiasts. These efforts brought peregrines back to Vermont — on a wing and a prayer.

ADDISON COUNTY CHICKS AND PAIRS

Each spring Fish and Wildlife closes 10 or 12 cliff areas around Vermont to protect nesting peregrine falcons, including cliffs at Deer Leap in Bristol, Rattlesnake Point in Salisbury, the Great Cliff overlook at Mt. Horrid in Goshen and the overlook south of the pond on Snake Mountain in Addison.

At these and two other known cliff sites around Addison County where

peregrines like to nest, two nesting pairs produced a total of five chicks this season, Buck said.

A nesting pair returned to Mt. Horrid in Goshen, but the nest failed. And at Deer Leap, Rattlesnake Point and Snake Mountain state biologists reported what are called "territorial pairs" — a pair of peregrines who come to a site to evaluate its suitability and work toward establishing territory but do not nest and raise a family. Biologists hope that these "territorial pairs" will return next year and raise chicks successfully.

Peregrines mate for life, said Buck, and can return to the same site for up to 20 years. But their "fidelity," as Buck put it, is as much to the site as to each other.

Nests can fail or territorial pairs might reject a site for a variety of reasons, said Margaret Fowle, conservation biologist with Audubon Vermont's Peregrine Falcon Recovery Program. Fowle has been working on falcon recovery since 1997. If peregrines choose a cliff with a ledge too accessible to predators, a wily raccoon or other animal can sneak down and eat the eggs or vulnerable young chicks. High winds, heavy rains and extreme cold can also cause a nest to fail. Peregrines return to Vermont in March, so early days can mean rough weather. Because peregrines mate for life, if a partner dies it can also take the surviving mate a while to find someone new, either at its old nesting site or at a new one.

But among the greatest threats to peregrine nesting success are humans.

HUMAN DISRUPTION

Every year Vermont Fish and Wildlife, Green Mountain National Forest, Audubon and other organizations work together to get the word



AN ADULT PEREGRINE falcon flies over Snake Mountain in Addison. While no chicks hatched at Snake Mountain this year the Vermont falcon population has increased steadily since coming off the Vermont Endangered Species List in 2005.

Photo by Steve Faccio

out about leaving peregrine nesting sites undisturbed and these same agencies and organizations work together to post signs and block off areas. But any human intrusion can drive off the nesting falcons or cause a nest to fail.

Peregrines nest on ledges on high cliff sites, where the inaccessibility to predators protects the young and from which the adults can spot and strike prey on the wing. Peregrines eat other birds, which they take in flight. Curiously, some peregrines choose to nest on bridges, towers and high spots in urban areas, seemingly unbothered by the noise and traffic down below. One highly successful Vermont pair nests in a tower at Vermont Yankee. Others have successfully used road cuts and quarries. But all peregrines — whether in New York City or Vermont, innovator or traditional cliff dweller — are easily disturbed by human activity near the nesting site.

Two of the Addison County sites that have seen the lowest rates of success in recent years — Deer Leap in Bristol and Rattlesnake Point above Lake Dunmore — are also popular sites for hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts, noted Fowle. Whereas a Deer Leap pair consistently hatched one to three chicks a year from 2005 to 2009, since 2010 only two chicks have hatched at that site. Rattlesnake Point — where nesting pairs have produced 18 known chicks since biologists started keeping records in 1996 — has seen no chicks for the past five years.

"Almost every time I go up that way I see somebody on the cliff," said Fowle about Rattlesnake Point. "We've worked pretty hard to make sure the signs are visible. And the sign says the area is closed. But I

guess people think they can go up there and they're not going to bother the birds. There's just a general disregard for the signage at that particular site."

The peregrines show up at Rattlesnake Point in March when it's too cold and icy for hikers, said the NFS's Staats, who's also monitored that site closely for the past several years. They begin to establish a nest, thinking they've found a spot free from human disturbance, and then as the weather warms up in April and May people start showing up and the birds just give up even trying to establish a nest.

"It doesn't take much," said Staats. "Once people start showing up and disrupting them, they just give up. But by then it's too late in the season for them to claim a new territory and start over. They need to get their chicks hatched and fledged by mid-July."

Human intrusion can cause the birds to leave the eggs unincubated for too long, abandon the nest and the eggs entirely, or give up the whole commitment to nesting for that year. Peregrine nesting season lasts from March through August.

While the wildlife experts express enthusiasm for the peregrines' remarkable recovery in Vermont, they additionally express the need to continue to protect their recovery.

"Falcons are very, very sensitive to people and to anything really that's near their nest," said Buck. "They're very, very defensive. And even though they're not listed any longer as an endangered species, one of the reasons that they're not listed is that people have taken really good care of them. And we need to continue to take care of them. They could

slip backwards if we are careless. It's important that in these favorite hiking areas that also serve as good falcon nest sites that we just respect some distance and avoid the falcons until they are done nesting."

Buck also stressed the importance of maintaining and protecting peregrine habitat and keeping it free from cell towers, wind turbines and solar panels.

FLYING SOUTH

For the 67 chicks around Vermont who hatched and fledged this past summer — now grown into young adults capable of living on their own — it's time any day now to fly off to find winter homes in Florida, Cuba, Nicaragua and other sites along the Gulf states, in the Caribbean, in Central and even northern South America.

"They can't spend all winter getting ready to be adults," said Buck. "If you're going to survive in the wild, you've got to get up and get to Cuba by November or so if you want to have any chance of surviving as a youngster."

Buck encourages Vermonters to get out and look for peregrines riding on the north wind, heading to winter homes down south.

"Some of the juveniles will probably hang around as they continue to learn to fly and hunt in areas that they're most familiar with, but generally in September/October they're on their way!" said Buck. "They're on the move. And right about now if you hung out for any length of time near any peak along the Lake Champlain basin on a gorgeous day that's got some north breeze to it, you'd be bound to see peregrines go by."

Reporter Gaen Murphree is at gaenm@addisonindependent.com.



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