



Falcon River Field Trip Update

This year's Falcon River Trip offered two days of environmental outreach to schools in Allamakee County, and the Marquette and MacGregor school systems. Although rain and snowfall were predicted, it only rained most of the day. However, blustery, cold conditions did not allow the Maiden Voyage to take students onto the River. Consequently, the Harpers Ferry Community Center was converted into an environmental learning center for this year's Falcon River Trip. The center was divided into four learning stations.

In one of the sessions, Captain Robert Vavra presented a portion of his vast river knowledge. One area the students found most intriguing were the impressive collection of mussel shells that Robert included in his 20 minute talk. Although it was disappointing the River was not conducive for a cruise on Robert's boat, the students learned a lot about River lore.

Another learning station was staffed by an elder of the Ho-Chunk Nation, Mr. Bill Goodbear from Black River Falls, WI. Mr. Goodbear interpreted some of his native beliefs and customs to the youth. He keyed upon our national symbol, Bald Eagles, and shared some of his precious eagle feathers for the students' viewing.

Mr. Jarod Olson with Allamakee County Conservation Board brought along his collection of mammal hides. The students particularly enjoyed touching the fur from every mammal that had ever roamed the NE Iowa hillsides. The wolf hide was received with wide eyes all around. But it was the river otter, mink and raccoon hides that best represented the mammals of today's Mississippi River.

Dianne Moller from Hoos Woods Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Milton, WI., accompanied the true star of the Falcon River Trip. The Peregrine Falcon was in immaculate feathered condition. Students were able to share the same space with this remarkable raptor. Periodically the falcon would open its long wings with dramatic results. The bird seemed to revel in the students' full attention being heaped upon it. A smaller cousin of the peregrine, a merlin, was also included. The students were able to learn about the scarcity of these woodland falcons in Iowa. A third raptor included for the students environmental education was a screech owl. Students learned there are two color phases of this bird: gray or rufous red.

The Friday evening Fish Fry was a huge success due to the assistance of Harpers Ferry Fire Department and numerous volunteers. An incredible meal of fish, salads, baked potatoes and onions was served. The dessert table of pies and cakes was out of this world and it was obvious these folks of Allamakee county have an innate ability to be incredible hosts. They really commit to making their Friday Night Fish Frys the best it can possibly be.

Local contributors that provided necessary funds for the Falcon River Trip included Kristi Sheldon of Harpers Ferry. As a member of American Legion Scenic Post 722 she encouraged members to contribute to the event. Likewise the Boosters Club contributed funds for the live birds program. The Allamakee County Conservation Board contributed as did the Iowa Ornithologists' Union. Ms. Sheldon also hosted Loren Zephier, Chief of the Dakota Nation and Mr. Goodbear of the Ho-Chunk Nation. THANK YOU to sponsoring organizations, and particularly Kristi Sheldon and Captain Robert Vavra for all their tireless efforts to ensure Peregrine Falcons fly freely from our generation to the next and the next, forever.

*- Pat Schlarbaum,
WDP Technician*



Bill Goodbear, Kristi Sheldon, Loren Zephier,
and Dianne Moller with falcon.

We will plan to celebrate next year's Falcon River Trip on May 3, 2014.

