

Falcons/ from A1

Peregrine falcons, once on the brink of extinction, feed on other birds that they kill by climbing high in the sky and then plummeting toward earth, slamming into their prey at speeds in excess of 200 mph.

Some of that speed was on display Thursday as the two parents swooped and screamed above the power plant in protest to the disruption by researchers.

“It’s nice they aren’t as vicious as we were warned they might be,” Ries said.

“Well, that’s because they outnumbered me when I was up here alone checking on them,” replied Lynn Hall, an Xcel environmental analyst who oversees the nesting box program. “They really swooped down on me when I was alone. Now, we outnumber them.”

With faces only their mother could



PETER J. WASSON/STAFF PHOTO

The four chicks, none the worse for wear, back in their nesting box after being examined.

love, the chicks squawked and flapped as they were removed from the nesting box and examined. Their gender was determined by their size and squeals.

“Males tend to be quite a bit smaller and have a higher pitch,” Howe said, swabbing the mouth of a chick. “This is one of the drooliest little falcons I’ve ever seen. But overall, yeah, they look great.”

In something of a surprise, the parents are not the same pair, Penny and Peter, that raised two chicks at the power plant last year. Penny has a new beau, Scottie, who was hatched in the Houghton-Hancock area and first appeared at the power plant in 2021, when he and his mate

Scarlet raised two chicks.

What happened to Scarlet and Peter can’t be determined, but this spring, two males and a female were seen at the power plant, suggesting that perhaps Scottie returned and dethroned Peter for Penny’s hand.

Regardless, the four chicks bring the total hatched at the plant to 31.

“Four eggs is pretty common, but bringing all four to hatch is very good,” Ries said. “Part of it is the weather. If you get really inclement weather in spring, maybe the first or second egg they lay won’t hatch. But these chicks look very healthy, very well-fed and they’re in great habitat. It’s exactly what falcons want.”

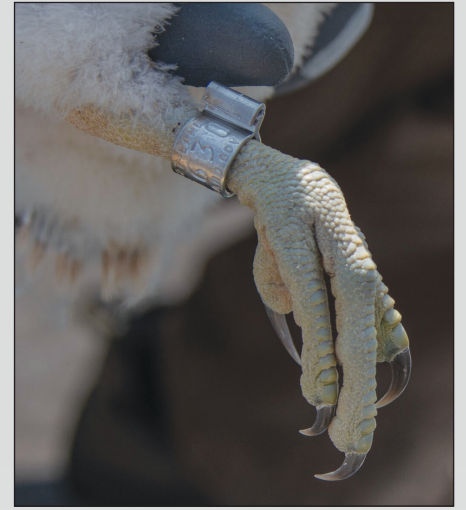
The remains of many meals littered the top of the power plant around the next box. Blue jay feathers, scattered bones, two entire pigeon wings and other remains confirm the parents’ hunting prowess.

They’re hunting over water, which is great because it leaves nowhere for their prey to escape,” Ries said.

Howe said there’s nothing to suggest all four chicks won’t continue to grow — they’re about three weeks old now — and make it to adulthood. Their next major hurdle will be learning to master the air as they hone their hunting skills. They should begin testing their wings in another two or three weeks, Ries said.

“Like a lot of animals, they will learn a lot about flying by playing,” she said. “The parents will continue to provide some care during their fledging and then, by late August, they should begin to disperse.

From there, who knows? Chicks typically tend to set up house within a couple



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY ED MONROE

Each chick is assigned a numbered band, attached to a chick’s leg just above razor-sharp talons that will one day be used to capture prey.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY ED MONROE

Saliva and blood samples will help researchers determine if the falcons have been exposed to avian flu.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY ED MONROE

Ries wears a rock-climbing helmet, to protect her from angry parents that will strafe and slam into researchers, and a mask to protect the chicks from any diseases she might carry.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY ED MONROE

Amy Ries of the Raptor Resource Project attaches a band to a chick’s leg. The bands will allow scientists to track where the chicks go and with whom they mate.

of hundred miles of their hatching sites, once they return from wintering on the Gulf Coast or further south.

“But there are always outliers, so they may come back to this area or they may not,” Ries said.

And after now raising six chicks at the power plant, Hall and Ries said there’s no reason to believe Penny and Scottie — and perhaps Peter — will be back next year.

If they do return, they likely will find a webcam set up to record their courting, egg-laying and other habits. Hall and Howe are working on the project now.

“That would be great,” Hall said. “That would allow students and everyone to see the incredible things happening here.”

Sears/ from A1

Because of Andy Lajcak’s experience running the Sears store, Mertz believes he will be an ideal person to manage the new store.

“He’s a smart guy who has experience with appliances and knows how to communicate well,” Mertz said of Lajcak.

Ashland is an attractive market to do business in, Mertz said, serving as the hub for the Bay Area and beyond.

“Our reach will also encompass as far east as

Ironwood and Hurley, so we’ll reach into Michigan,” he said.

Prime Appliance has been in business in Superior for nearly 20 years, offering sales and service on all sorts of appliances.

“Sears was different — you had to special order everything. We can cater to what the people want. If it is the last one, you can have it. If we don’t have one in stock, they can take the floor model. We have a full delivery service where we can bring it and hook it up. We will bring that to the Bay Area,” he said.



TOM STANKARD/STAFF PHOTO

Work crews on Monday morning began tearing out the old parking lot of the old Sears store as a Superior appliance dealer prepares to move into the building.