

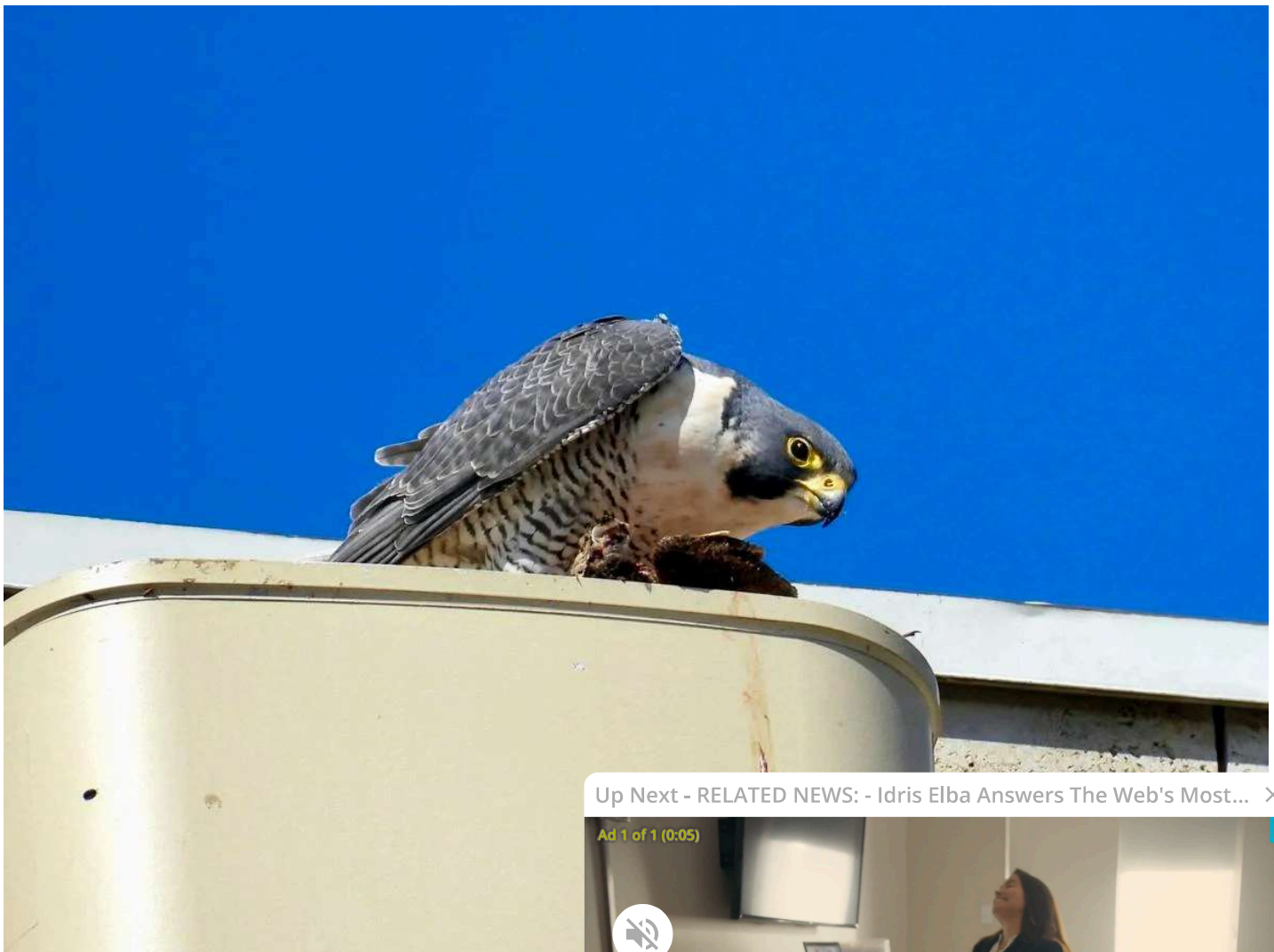
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ALERT TOP STORY TOPICAL

Peregrine falcon population makes 'phenomenal' recovery in Wisconsin and Minnesota

Eric Lee

Apr 25, 2024



A peregrine falcon eats a meal April 11 on the U.S. Ba
Eric Lee

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An advertisement for a video. It shows a woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark blazer and colorful patterned leggings, sitting on a black office chair at a desk. She is looking towards the camera with her hands raised in a gesture. On the desk in front of her is a laptop. The background is a modern office or home workspace with large windows and a white wall. A small blue triangle icon is in the top right corner of the ad. A mute icon is overlaid on the left side of the ad.

Whatever your reason for being away from home

Eric Lee

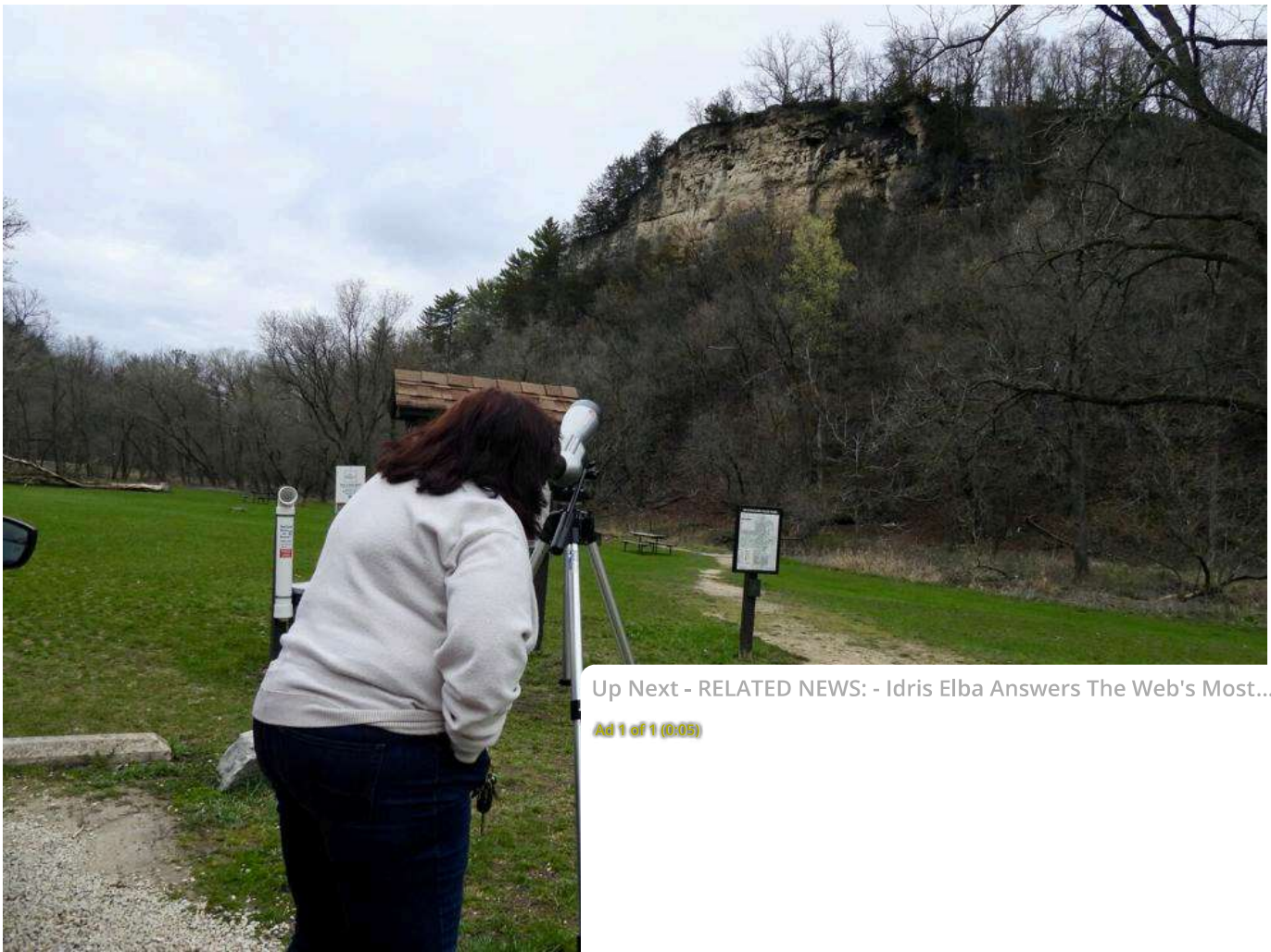
ALTURA, Minn. — The symbolism isn't lost on Jackie Fallon.

Back in the 1960s, as DDT decimated the peregrine falcon population across the United States, the final known mating pair in Minnesota nested in a cliff in Whitewater State Park in the southeastern part of the state.

Then, for nearly five decades, they were absent from the park.

But on a recent Thursday, Fallon hadn't even opened her car door before she watched a peregrine land on a cliff ledge just one bluff to the east of the historical nesting site.

"Pull in, see an exchange," said Fallon, the vice president of field operations for the Midwest Peregrine Society. "OK, check, check, check."



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Jackie Fallon observes a peregrine falcon April 18 in

Eric Lee



On a more regular field day, she would head off to the next site on her list, where she might have to wait four hours to see any activity. But on this day, Fallon took in the moment while discussing how far peregrines have come since they all but disappeared from the region.

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“To me, it’s like a full circle kind of thing,” Fallon said. “This was the last (nesting site), and now they’re back.”

From Fallon’s perspective, the peregrine recovery effort that started in the 1980s in the Midwest has been a success.

“We’re sitting at right about 80 nesting pairs right now in (Minnesota), which is double what we had in the entire region historically,” Fallon said. “The peregrine program has been considered the most successful endangered species program in North America.”

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“We’ve got about a 2,800% increase in 1 before DDT impacted them.”

The federal government delisted peregr though they are still listed in Wisconsin as a special concern species.

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Trends in recent years are also encouraging.

Last year, Minnesota averaged three chicks per successful territory — the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s goal is one per successful territory — and nearly half of the territories were on natural sites as opposed to those on human-made structures.

“To me, that’s the sign of recovery,” Fallon said. “They’re not getting any assistance from us.”



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A peregrine falcon perches April 11 on the U.S. Bar
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Natural nesting is lower in Wisconsin –
Wisconsin Falconwatch report — but still an
average of 2.88 young across those sites

X

“(There’s) definitely an upward trajectory to the number of nesting pairs in the state,” said Rich Staffen, a conservation biologist and zoologist with the state Department of Natural Resources. “Especially in the last probably two to three decades, the numbers have steadily been rising.”

Still, Staffen and Justin Nooker, a Wisconsin DNR ecologist based in La Crosse, say there is still work to be done. While successful nests are increasing, it’s estimated that only 1 out of 4 fledglings reach adulthood and the DNR would like to see more natural nest sites.

There are challenges to making that a reality, though, both natural and human caused. Human activity on ridges above cliff sites can disturb peregrines, and predators like great horned owls and raccoons are far more prevalent near natural nests than they are in urban settings, where nesting boxes are often placed on high structures.

“There’s a lot of dangers in that first year of existence for these birds,” Staffen said.

Fallon said owls are frequently a menace at Frontenac State Park in Minnesota, and one killed an adult peregrine and at least two young last year at Great Spirit Bluff near La Crescent. Man-made structures aren’t immune, though; at the Dairyland Power station in Genoa in 2019, one of the final years with a box at the site, a raccoon climbed a service ladder and destroyed the nest.

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Jackie Fallon holds Rhye, a rescued peregrine falcon, on April 18 in Whitewater State Park.

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“Nature is not kind or cruel. Nature is nature ...,” Fallon said. “It does what it needs to do to seek out some type of existence and survival.”

But Fallon likes to remind people that such instances don’t happen at a majority of the sites, and there is still triumph amid the tragedy.

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New sites were observed last year in All Wisconsin, just to name a few. And eight Spirit Bluff this year — a sign of peregrine

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“To have 80-85% of all peregrines disappear is prevalent that they don’t need to be on the species list, (to) get them off the list,” Fallon

X

done here in the Midwest in less than 30 years time to get them to that point.” When Fallon says she’s proud of “the work we’ve done,” she doesn’t just mean the Midwest Peregrine Society. The effort has been a collaboration.

The Raptor Resource Project is another vital nonprofit that is active in the Coulee Region, and state wildlife officials play their part, too. That’s not to mention individuals — whether they are researchers like Septon and the Raptor Resource Project’s Amy Ries or private landowners who work with the nonprofits on natural nesting sites — and businesses.

In 1997, western Wisconsin’s first successful hatch in 25 years happened at the Dairyland Power station in Alma. The cooperative was approached by the Raptor Resource Project in the early 1990s and has hosted at least one nest box since 1994.

Ben Campbell, who is Dairyland’s environmental biologist and has been with the company for 11 years, still remembers getting to put an identifying band on a young peregrine on just his second day on the job and said Dairyland takes pride in being involved with the recovery.

“It’s been one of our longer running stewardship projects,” Campbell said. “Every year, you get a bunch of people internally that want to name the birds and watch the bird cams religiously.”

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Jackie Fallon shows bands that are used to track peregrine falcons.

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There's a similar culture at the U.S. Bank building in downtown La Crosse, where there's been a box since 2006.

“It's always interesting to see how many eggs (are laid),” said Mark Hyde, the building's manager. “Not all of them survive, but we usually have, pretty consistently, three new birds a year.”

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Both Campbell and Hyde expressed the Project, and volunteers with that group important role.

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Dairyland Power Cooperative Alma Cam Live Stream



It takes both time and money to monitor nesting sites throughout Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa, especially when the process includes repelling down to natural nests and putting tracking bands on the youngsters. Having a large and knowledgeable network of volunteers can also make a difference when faced with a particularly territorial peregrine; adults are known to chase bald eagles and red-tailed hawks away from their nests, and Fallon said her group needs three people to retrieve chicks and five to protect the people retrieving chicks at the Mayo Clinic site in Rochester.

When she can, Fallon also seeks to educate others about peregrines — sometimes by talking to college students, sometimes by showing her rescued peregrine Rhye at programs.

Donations certainly help the nonprofits but they are also concerned about their volunteer ranks getting older. Fallon has been with the Peregrine Society since 1988.

“I’ve been given great opportunities by just hope there’s somebody up and coming project,” Fallon said. “Still looking for t (helping the project) yet.”

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As Fallon said, nature is nature, so it's impossible to predict exactly how this nesting season will turn out.

But early signs are promising.

Many peregrines returned in February and began laying eggs earlier this month. Peregrines at John A. Latsch State Park, Queen's Bluff and Frontenac are incubating, and there are four eggs at both the U.S. Bank building and Dairyland in Alma with estimated hatches in early May.

Successful hatches would bring the total at those two sites to 55 and 165, respectively.

Time will tell how many sites are successful, but there is progress to celebrate nonetheless.

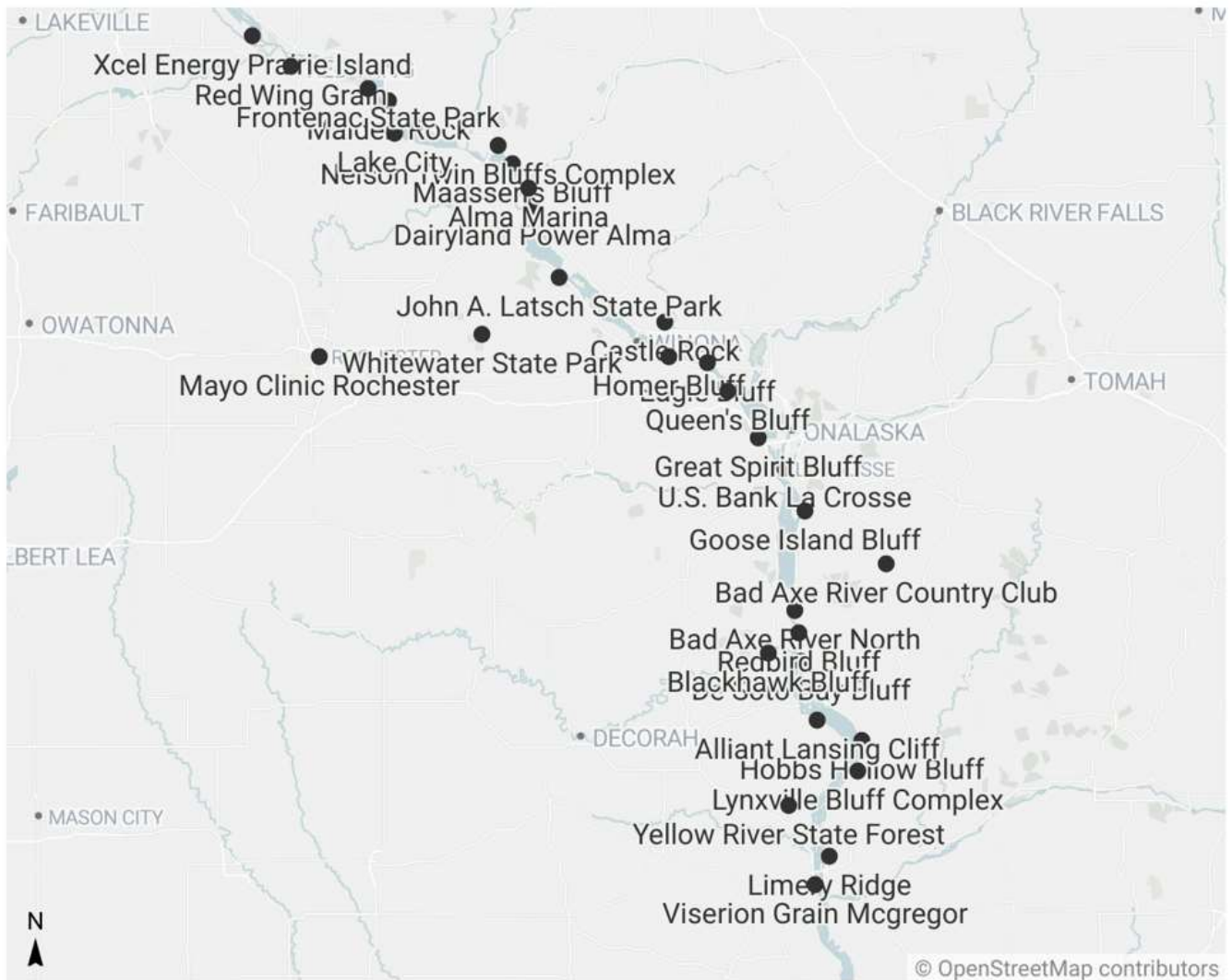
"I am constantly learning about this project and trying to figure out how the population is doing," Fallon said. "And we are doing phenomenal."

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Peregrine falcon nesting sites in the Coulee Region



Source: Wisconsin Falconwatch, Raptor Resource Project and Midwest Peregrine Society • Created with Datawrapper

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Peregrine falcon nesting sites near La Crosse



Source: Wisconsin Falconwatch, Raptor Resource Project and Midwest Peregrine Society • Created with Datawrapper

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Peregrine falcon nesting sites south of La Crosse



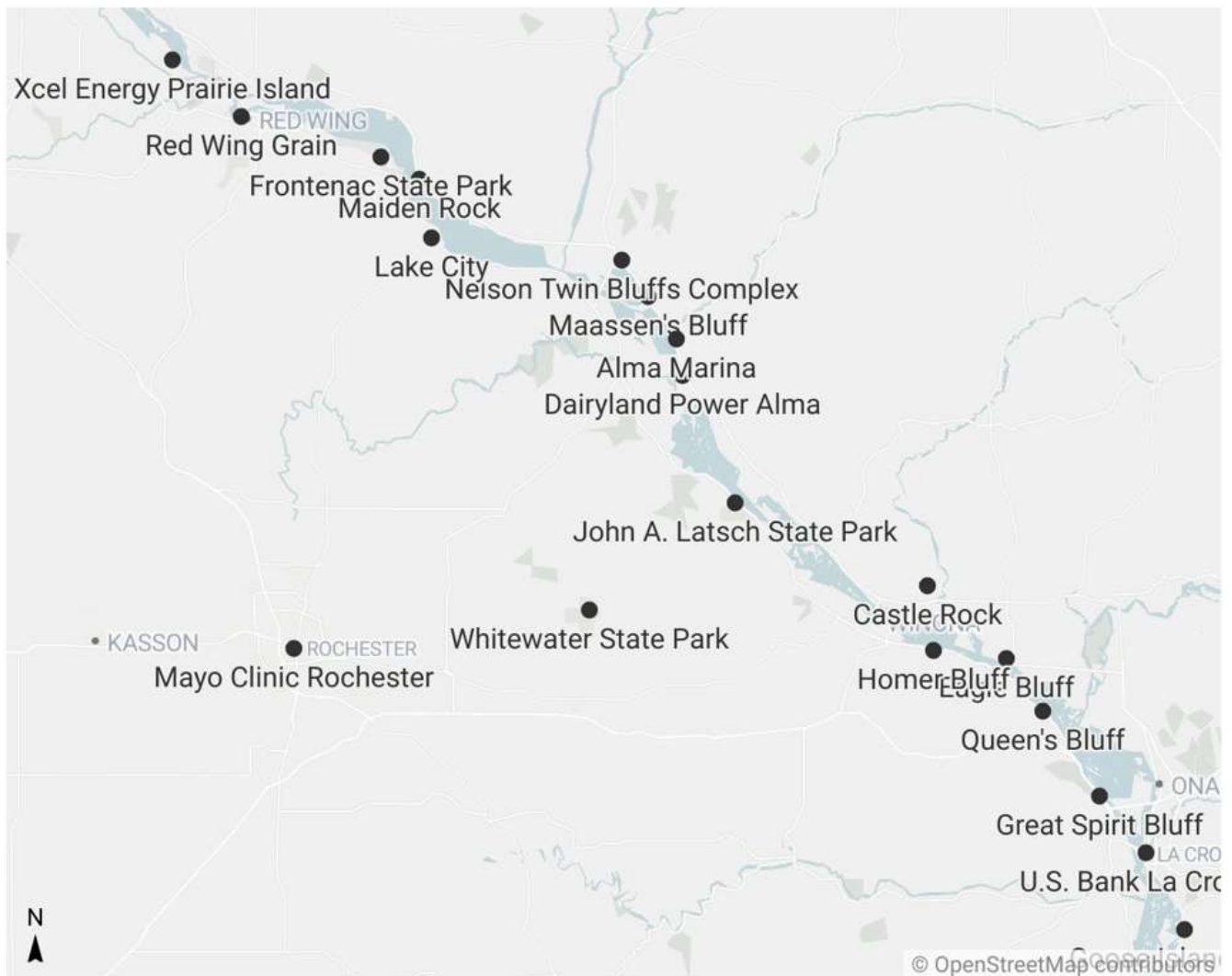
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Peregrine falcon nesting sites in southeast Minnesota



Source: Wisconsin Falconwatch, Raptor Resource Project and Midwest Peregrine Society • Created with Datawrapper

Photos of peregrine falcons in the Coulee Region

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Peregrine falcon on St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral spire



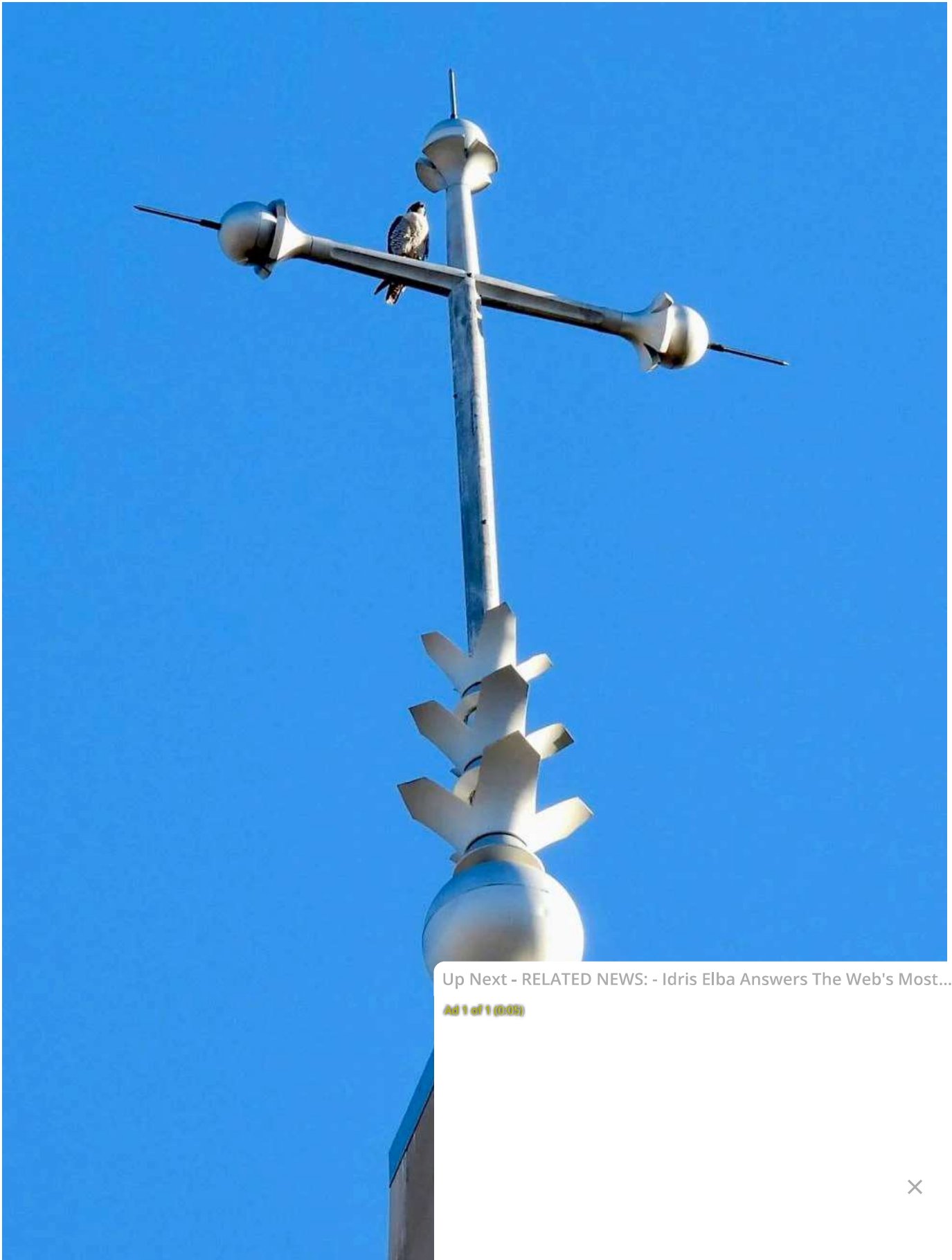
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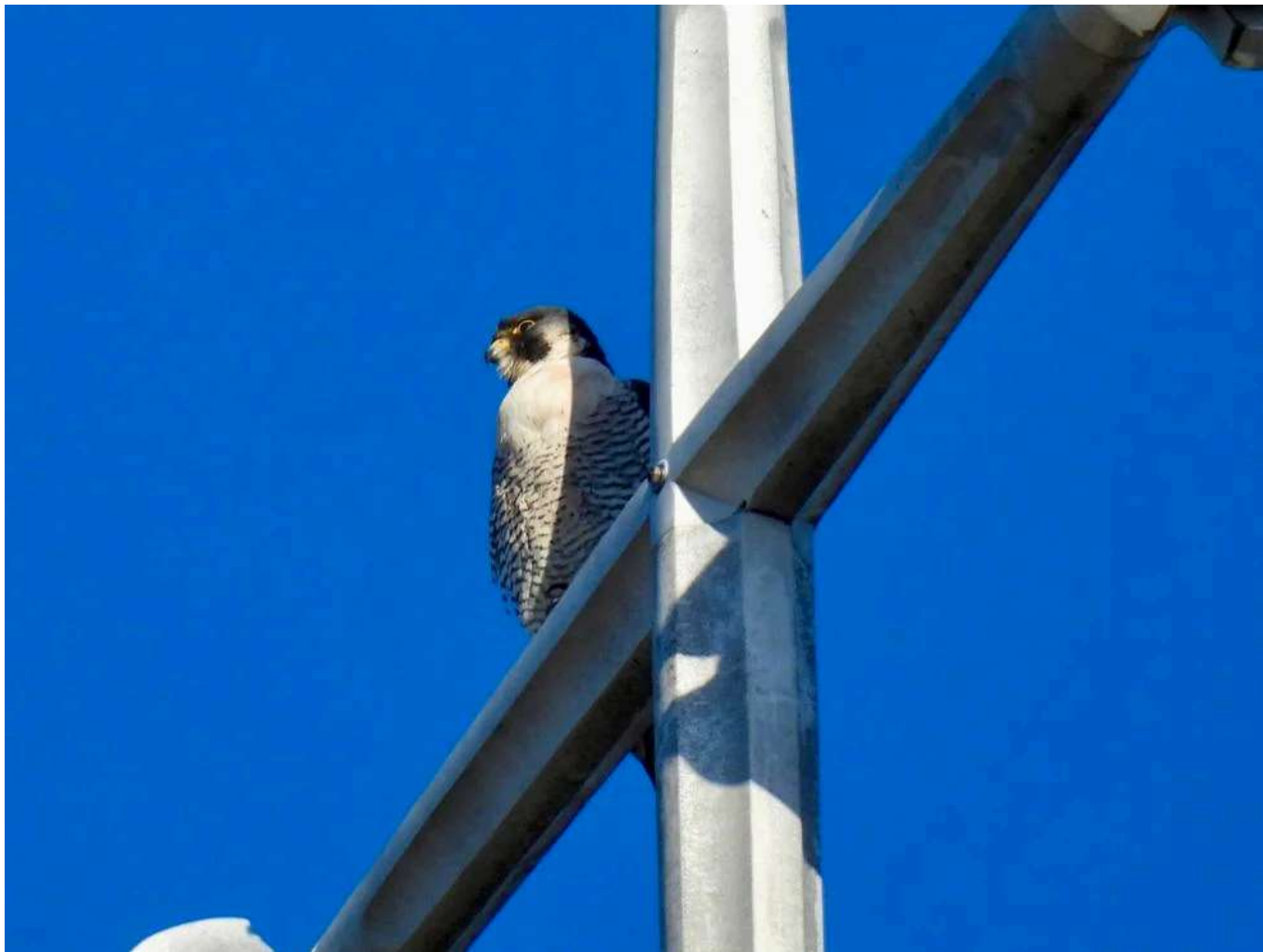


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Peregrine falcon at Whitewater State Park



A peregrine falcon perches on a cliff ledge April 18 in Whitewater State Park.

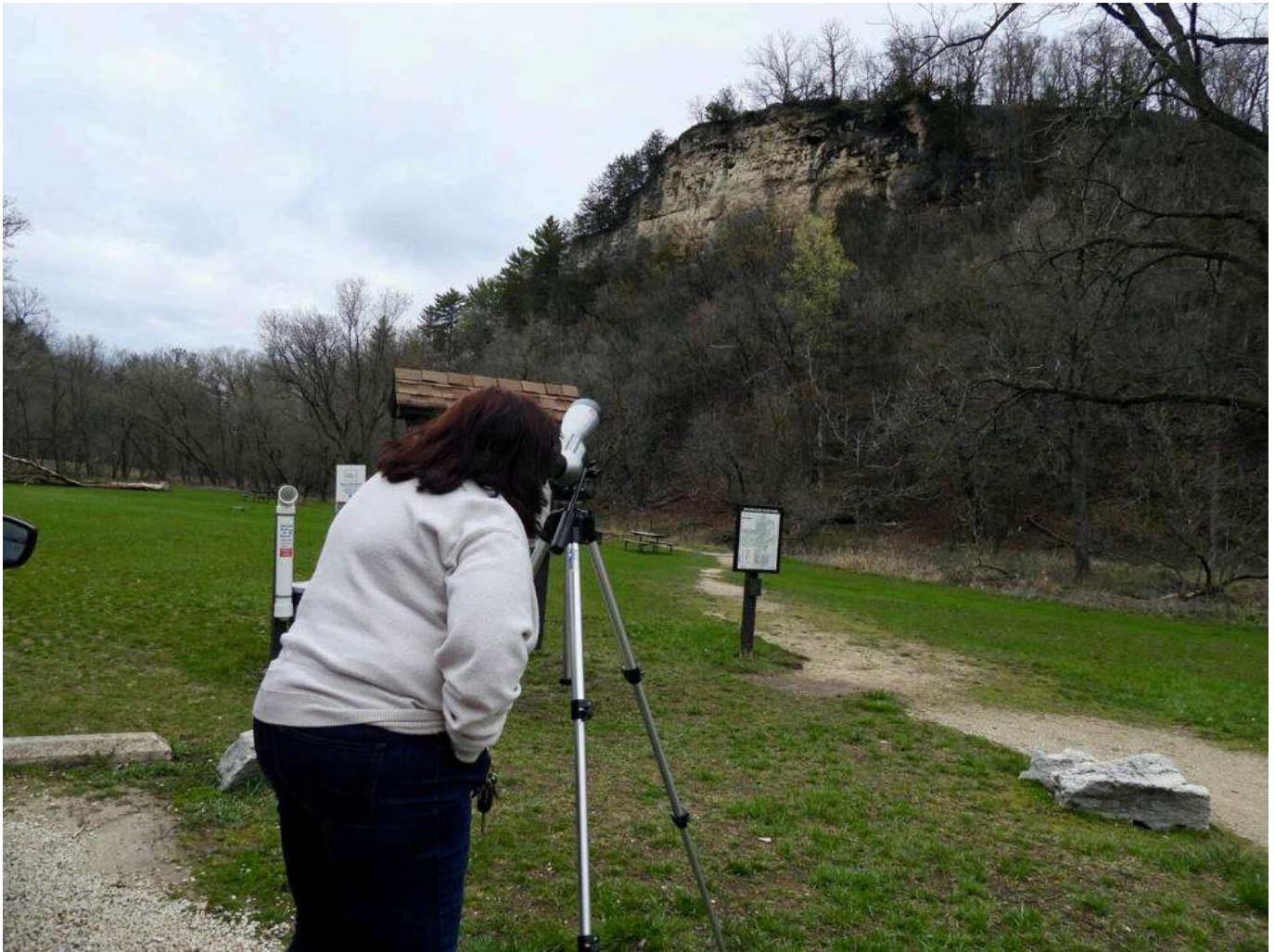
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Jackie Fallon observes a peregrine falcon April 18 in Whitewater State Park.

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Peregrine falcons on US Bank building downtown



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Peregrine falcons on US Bank building downtown



Peregrine falcons perch April 14 in their nest box on the U.S. Bank building in downtown La Crosse.

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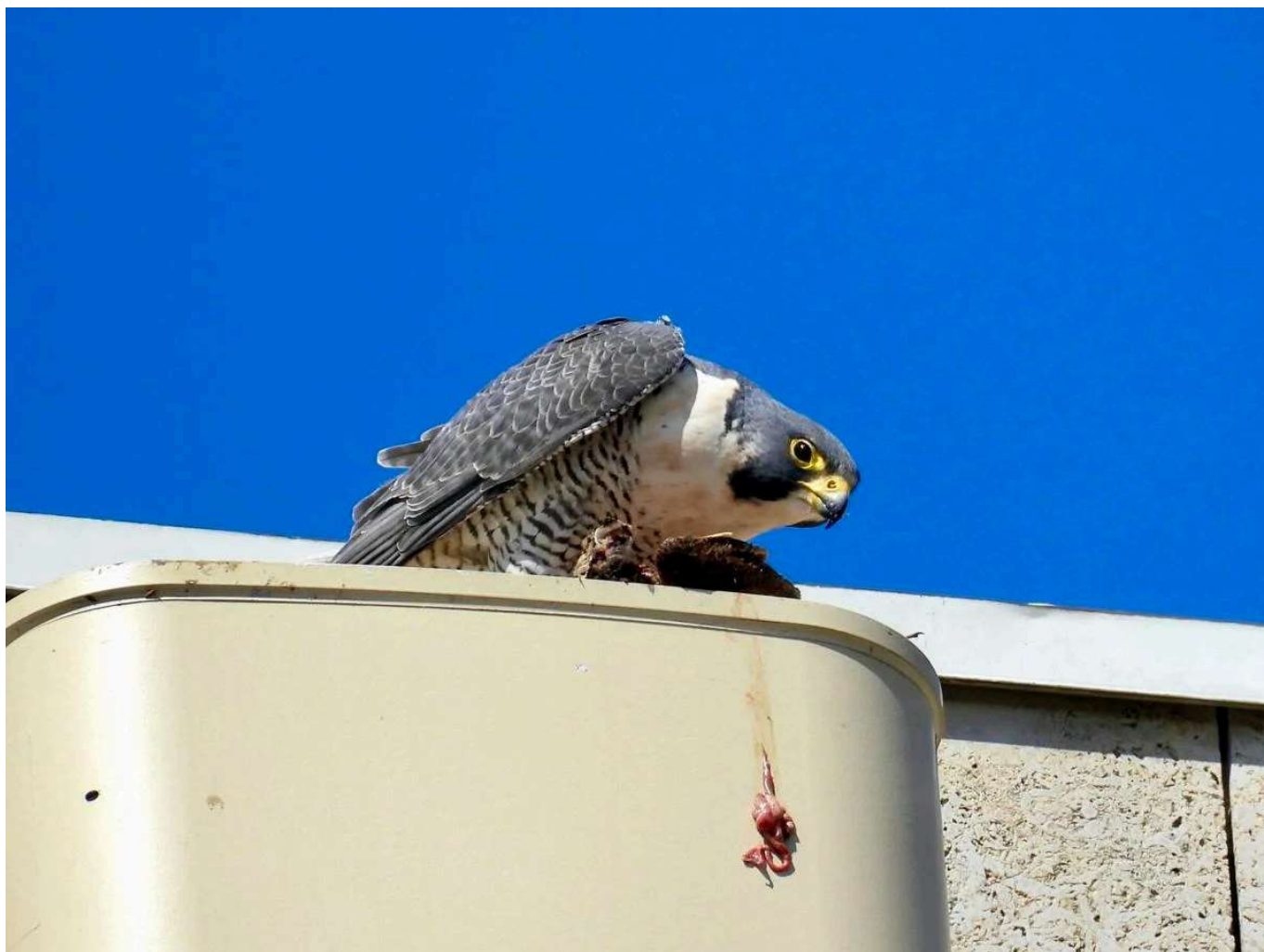
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Peregrine falcon on US Bank building downtown



A peregrine falcon eats a meal April 11 on the U.S. Bank building in downtown La Crosse.

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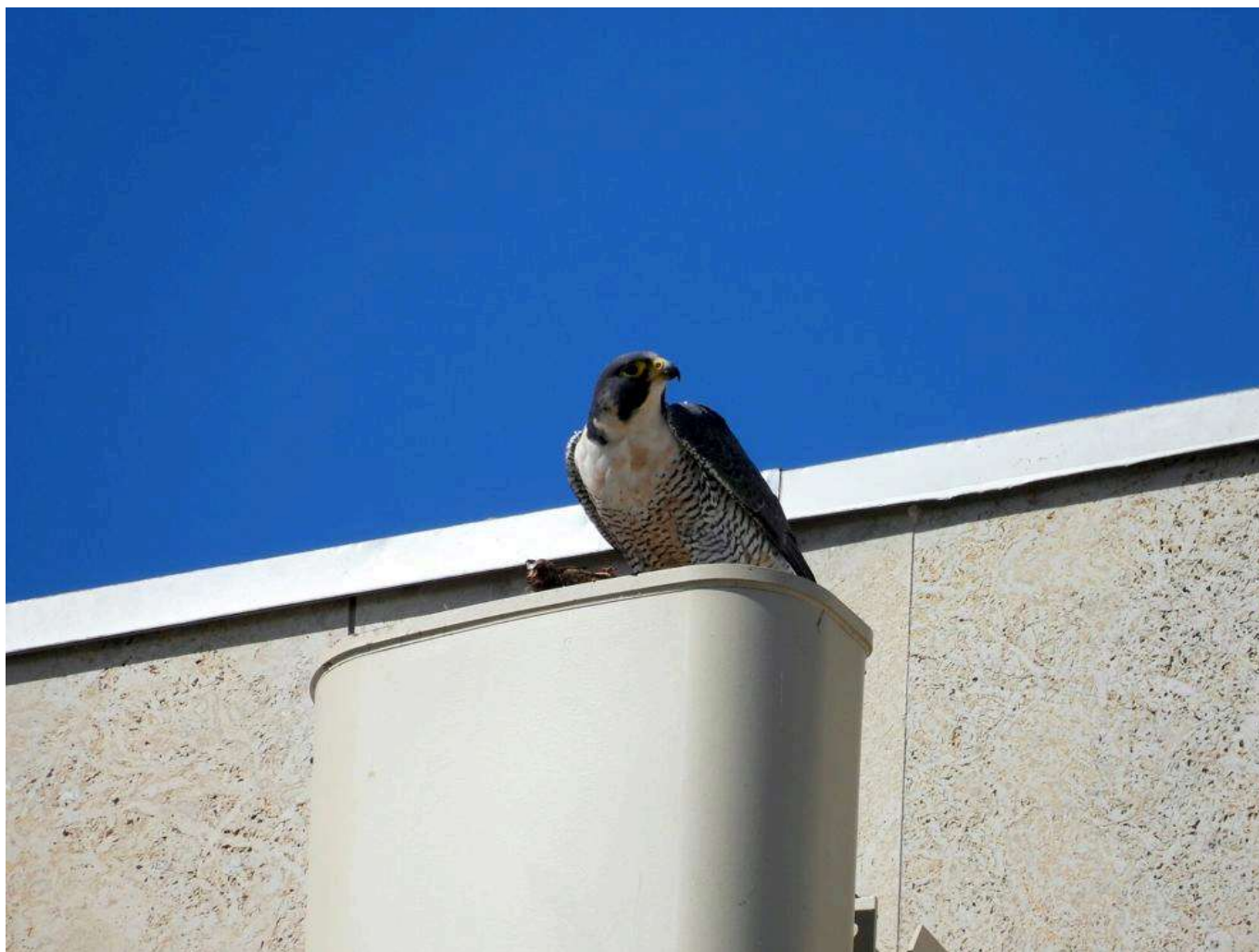
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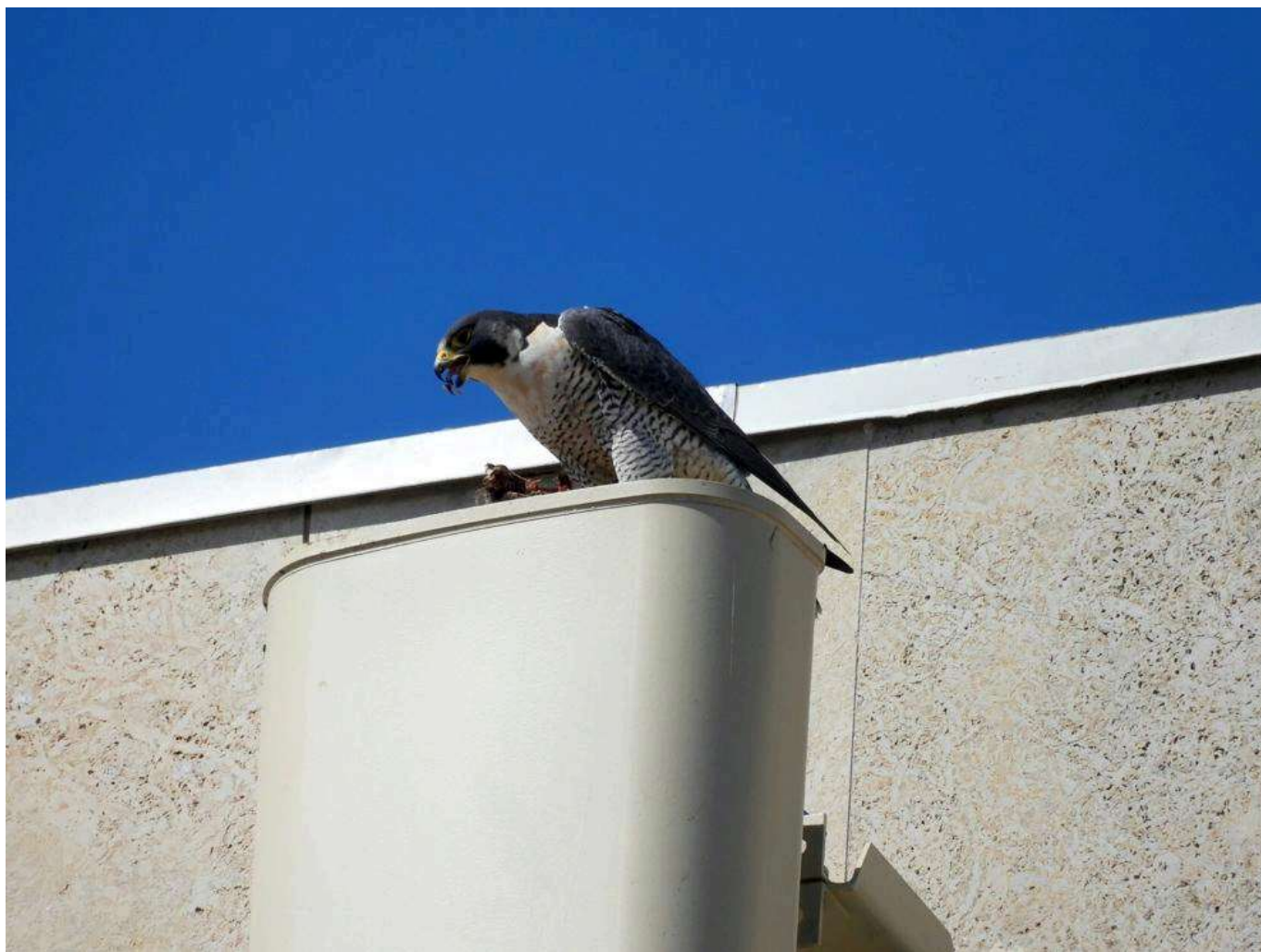
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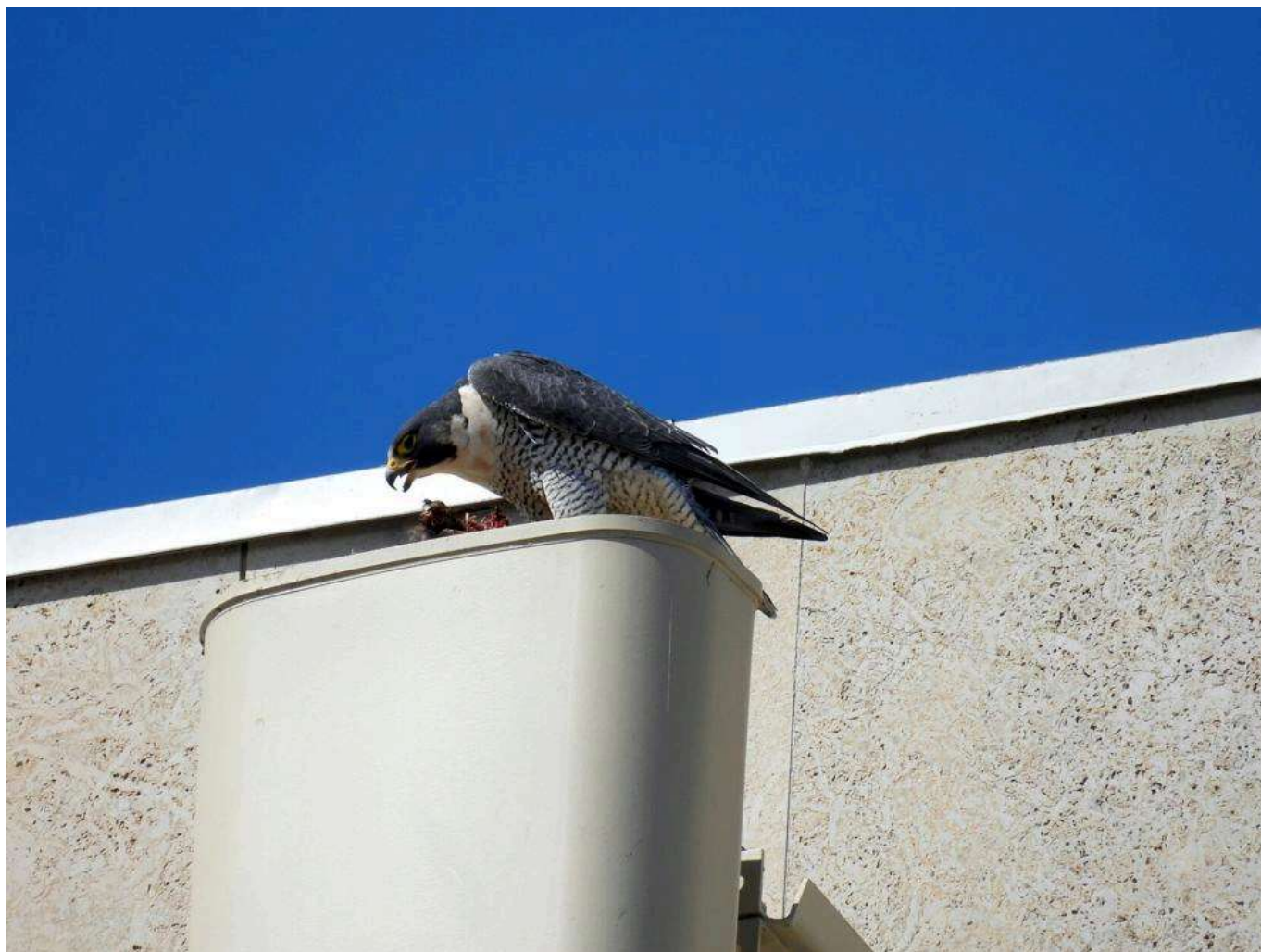
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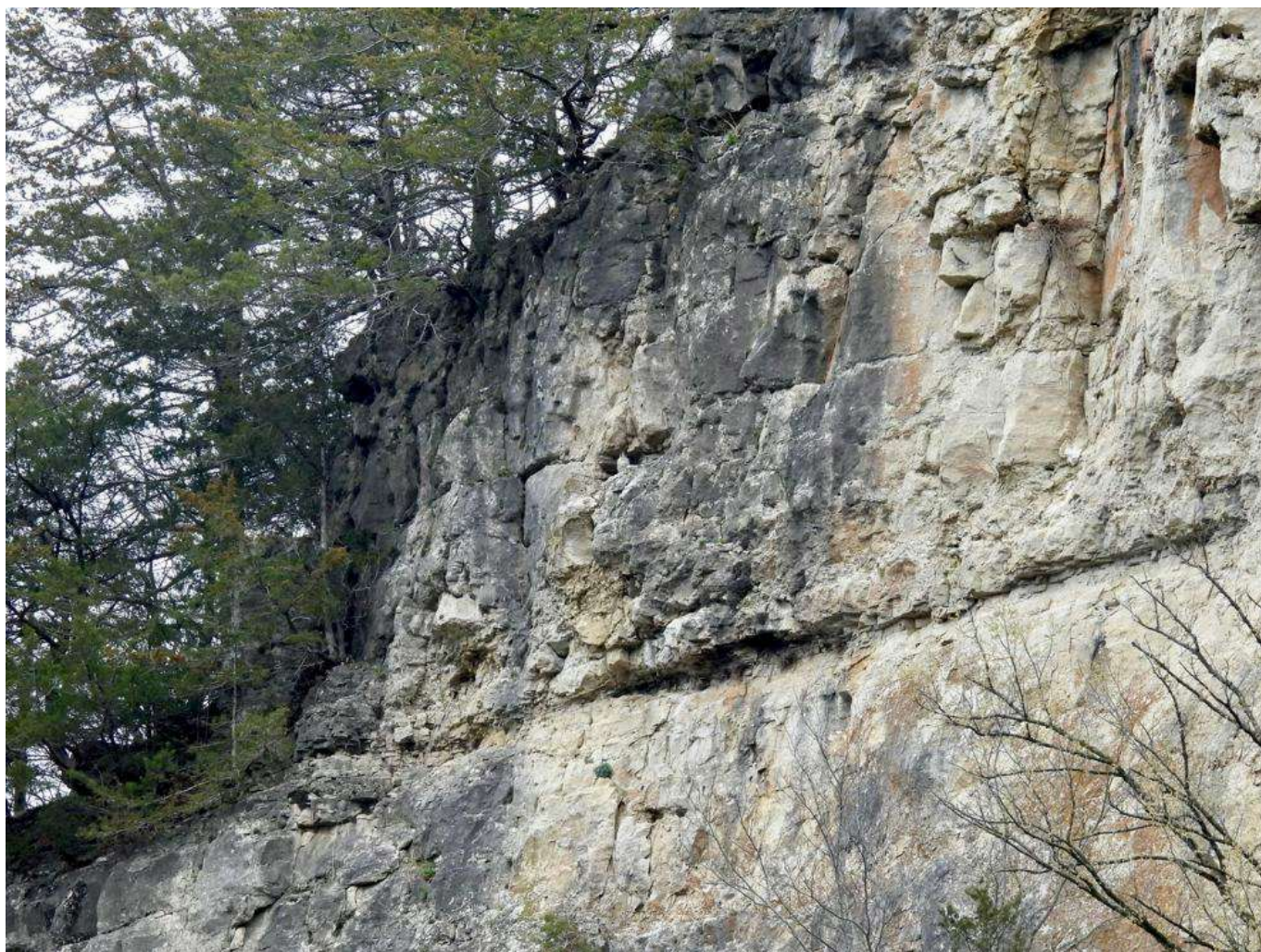
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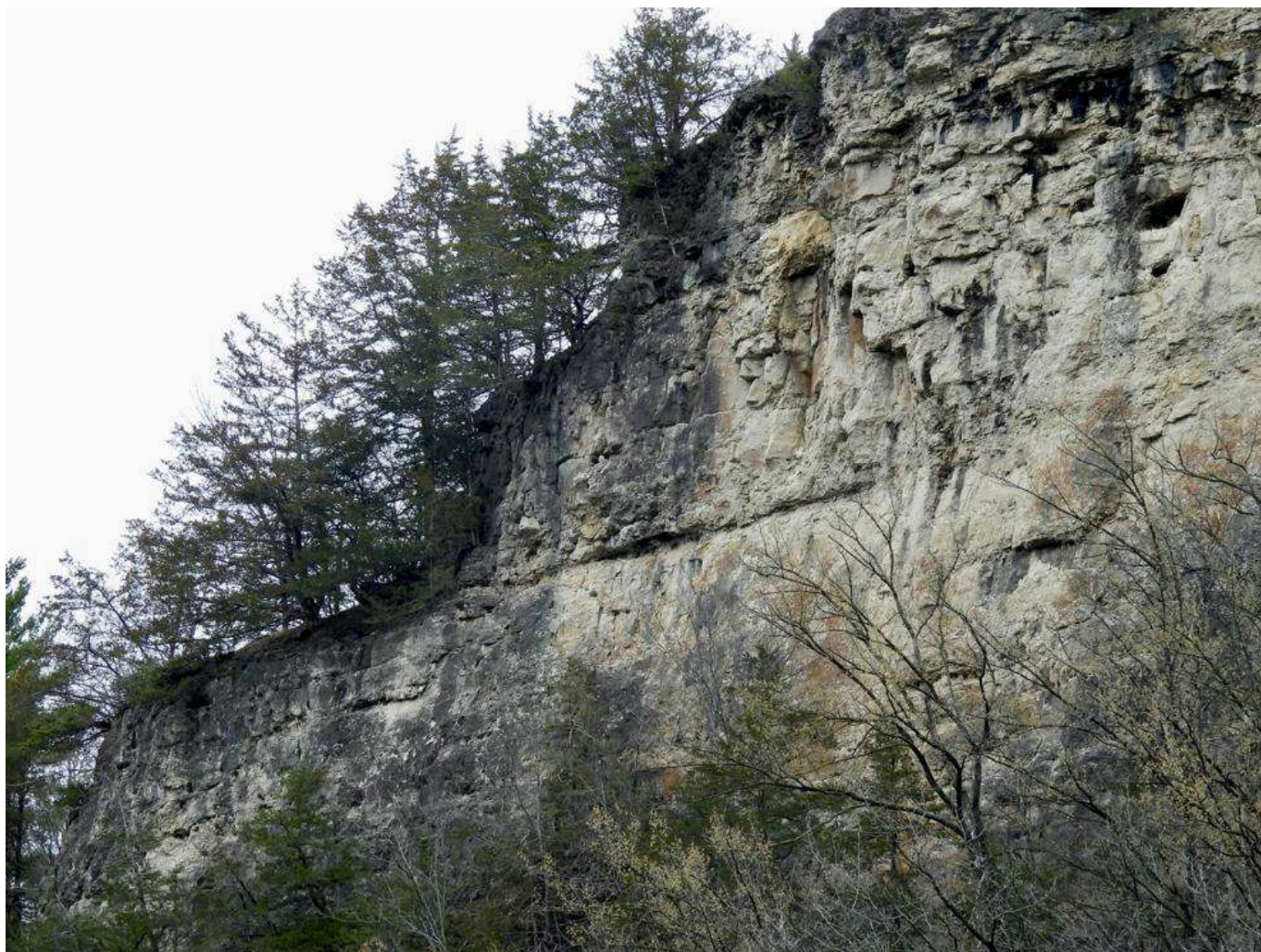
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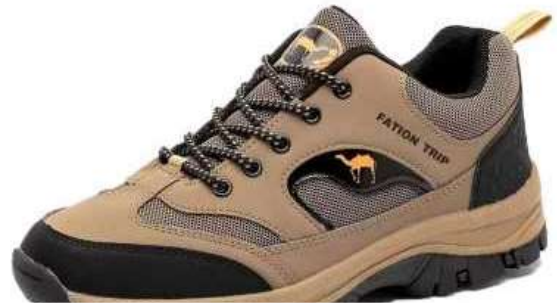
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By Eric Lee

Copy editor

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