

Time nears for Freddy Falcon to take flight



Live mascot poised to soar over UWRF

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Freddy, the falcon, is shown with Master Falconer Jordan Jones who owns Freddy. Jones has been working with falcons for seven years and is licensed by the federal government and Wisconsin government as a falconer. He obtained permission from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources before obtaining Freddy as a live mascot for UW-River Falls.

While the Falcon college football team is training hard for the Oct. 4 Homecoming game, so is the new UW-River Falls mascot.

Only Freddy, the falcon, isn't doing push-ups or sit-ups. He's practicing his flying.

Freddy is three-quarters peregrine falcon and a one-

quarter gyrfalcon. He belongs to UWRF student and Master Falconer Jordan Jones.

And, he's UWRF's new live mascot.

Jones is still working with Freddy now, but eventually he will be able to fly Freddy at games, using special techniques and tools to bring out some impressive natural behaviors.

Jones uses a "lure" on a 7-foot-long rope that he spins.

"I spin it around and intentionally make him miss," Jones said. "When he does, he'll stoop after it."

"He makes these big figure-eight passes at this lure. That's just a natural behavior that can be brought out for...demonstration."

Eventually, this is what Freddy will do at football games, swooping out over the crowd, before wheeling back to try and catch the lure.

Jones has also been working with Freddy using a spe-



Freddy, the falcon, is UW-River Falls' new live mascot. He's part peregrine falcon, part gyrfalcon. At about 5 months, he's only a juvenile now, but by next year, he'll have grown into his adult plumage and coloring. (River Falls Journal photos by Gretta Stark.)

cial kite, flying up at 1,000 to 1,500 feet.

The kite has a piece of meat attached to a special release. Freddy grabs the meat, which is released, but still attached to the kite by a carabiner.

Freddy flies back to the ground with the meat and gets his treat. Jones is then able to approach and recover Freddy.

"That's also really good enrichment for him, not just for his health and his well-

being, but also mental stimulation," Jones said. "It's a game for him and he really enjoys it."

Again, when Jones is working with Freddy, he's not

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teaching the bird so much as bringing out natural behaviors.

Jones first became interested in falconry at age 12, after seeing the movie "My Side of the Mountain," in which a boy, about his age (at the time), tamed a falcon.

Jones was fascinated.

"So I looked it up and called all the pet stores in town and looked for a peregrine falcon, and was shot down obviously," Jones said.

But, years later, in about



Jordan Jones

2006, he met a coworker of his father who was a Master Falconer, and ended up becoming Jones' mentor.

Jones trapped his first bird, a red-tailed hawk, in 2007. Since then, he's worked several internships, worked on the Cape May Raptor Banding Project in New Jersey, done many raptor demonstrations and worked for the American Eagle Foundation which teamed up with the Dollywood theme park to do shows.

Now, Jones has his own business, Falcon Tactics LLC., which offers bird abatement, raptor programs and guided hunts with birds of prey. He especially enjoys showing birds for conservation education.

Jones will receive his Bachelor of Science in field biology from UWRF this December.

An Arkansas native, Jones transferred from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2012 to be nearer his girlfriend who got a job in this area.

"I was going through admissions and applying for the school. It was one thing that stuck out in my mind," Jones said. "I'm a falconer and this is a falcon for the mascot. This is a sign that I should be here."

And then Jones thought, "What if I flew one of my birds at a football game?"

Jones met ornithology professor and biology department chair Dr. Mark Bergland in Bergland's ornithology class.

Jones brought in his red-tailed hawk Lira for the class to observe. He ended up collaborating with Bergland on the idea of having a live mascot for the school — and using it for conservation education.

Jones said that will include bringing it into classrooms as a teaching aid so that people can see one up close.

"They can examine how evolution has shaped these animals," Jones said. "It was just a natural thought to have the bird at football games and use it to rally students and faculty and staff as well."

Bergland said he had been dreaming of a live mascot for UWR for years, and he was very happy his and Jones' efforts are now "taking flight."

"No other school in the UW

system has a falcon for a mascot, so this is a good fit for UWRF," Bergland said.

Jones got Freddy July 12. Freddy is about 5 months old now, and Jones is working with Freddy to help him build up his muscles.

"He's being trained like an athlete," Jones said. "He's on a strict diet — a very nutritious diet — and a pretty extensive exercise routine."

In addition to public appearances, Jones hopes to use Freddy to help naturally decrease pigeon and starling overpopulation at the UWRF Mann Valley Lab Farm.

"We can fly Freddy there," Jones said. "It just adds raptor pressure to the area, and it persuades the pest birds to leave... it's very effective and it's 100% natural, sustainable."

And he said it was preferable to using chemicals to eliminate pest birds.

Because Freddy was bred in captivity, he cannot be released, the way caught raptors are. That means Freddy will, hopefully, be around UWRF for many years to come.

After he graduates, Jones hopes to secure a position at UWRF that would allow him to work with recruitment, fly Freddy at games, and use Freddy for bird abatement.

People will have their first chance to see Freddy live and in the feathers during UWRF's homecoming parade next week.

Freddy and Jones will put in appearances at the parade and half-time of the game.

However, Freddy won't be doing any fancy flying yet — he and Jones need to train more first. But Jones said he hopes Freddy will be ready to fly in front of crowds in a few months.