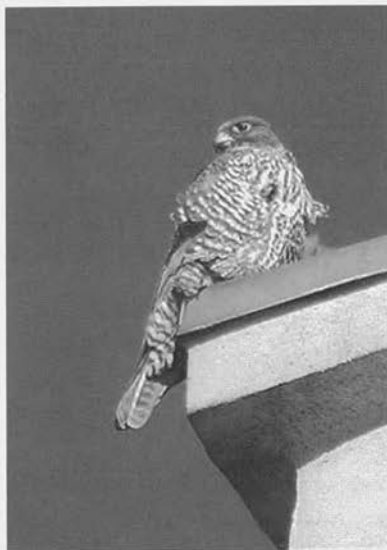


# A Gyr Winter

David Larson

Arguably the Massachusetts birding event of the winter was the presence of a very cooperative Gyrfalcon in Boston. First seen at Logan Airport by Jim Murray on Dec. 3, and then reported by Ronnie Donovan and party during the Greater Boston Christmas Count on Dec. 16, this bird has been regularly seen at Logan and in South Boston in the vicinity of the Boston Design Center on Drydock Avenue and the adjacent Black Falcon Terminal.



ANDREW JOSLIN

Recently I spoke with Norm Smith, Director of the Blue Hills Trailside Museum, who runs a Snowy Owl project from Logan Airport (see page 88) and has had ample opportunity to observe this falcon this winter. In 1998 Norm captured and banded a Gyrfalcon at Logan Airport. He has been trying to capture this Gyr to determine whether the band it wears is his. Obviously, recaptures of irruptive Gyrfalcons are very rare. So far, however, this bird has proved to be extremely trap-shy. On numerous occasions, it has been attracted to lures only to hover and then fly away.

There has been much speculation about the gender of this Gyrfalcon. Norm reports seeing it perched near the female Peregrine Falcon of the Custom House pair, and it is considerably larger, most likely a female. Indeed, Norm has noted many interactions between the Custom House Peregrines (at this time of year, the adults have driven off their offspring and are in sole possession of the territory) and this Gyrfalcon. The Peregrines harass the Gyr; the Gyr harasses the Peregrines. They stoop on each other, and chase each other. Several observers reported that the Gyr struck one of the Peregrines, knocking it apparently senseless onto the roof of the Boston Design Center. Searches of that roof by Tom French from MassWildlife have found no evidence of




DON SOUTHALL

*the last thing a black duck sees before . . .*  
Jane Stein (on MassBird)



SHAWN CAREY

a dead Peregrine, and the continuing presence of the Custom Tower pair seems to suggest that that interaction was not fatal. A report from another observer of the Gyr knocking a gull senseless (the observer could *hear* the impact), and then allowing it to recover and fly off, seems to suggest a behavioral pattern.

A series of interactions with a particularly feisty adult female Snowy Owl at Logan Airport has shown that the Gyr cannot always have her way. According to Norm, this female Snowy Owl is very territorial. On one occasion, the Gyr crossed her boundaries and the owl took off in pursuit. She was still chasing the Gyr when Norm lost sight of them out beyond Deer Island. Apparently undeterred, the Gyr has not given up harassing Snowy Owls and recently almost paid the price. She swooped down on the Snowy with the attitude, who inverted and snagged the Gyr in the wing with a talon. The Gyr managed to pull free, but the outcome of that encounter could have gone either way. (For more gyr images, see <<http://massbird.org/sightings.htm>>. Shawn Carey's photographs are posted at <<http://www.virtualbirder.com/gyr>>). 



SHAWN CAREY