

# Peregrine Falcons in Massachusetts in 2004

*Thomas W. French*

*Editor's Note.* In the February 2004 issue of *Bird Observer*, Tom French reviewed the historical status and recovery of Peregrine Falcons in Massachusetts. Here he updates this information for the 2004 breeding season.

## **Custom House/Federal Reserve Bank, Boston**

After the Marriott's Custom House closed off the traditional nest site that had been used since 1988, the pair moved to the President's balcony on the 32<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Federal Reserve Bank, where they nested in a landscaped section planted with shrubs and a few small trees. On June 2, 2004, we banded four three-week-old chicks (one male, three female). Although two of the chicks ended up on the ground near South Station on the day they fledged (June 21), one was able to fly back up to a building, and the other was placed on a building roof by the Animal Rescue League of Boston. Unfortunately, one of these chicks was found dead about a week later, apparently having struck a building. The adult male of this pair may be the oldest known Peregrine in the east at eighteen years old.

## **Christian Science Church Administration Building, Boston**

On June 2 we banded four five-week-old chicks (three male, one female). One of these chicks was picked up on the ground on the day it fledged and was taken to the New England Wildlife Center in Hingham until it could be returned to the roof of the building.

## **Tobin Bridge/Logan Airport**

A visit to the nest box on the Tobin Bridge on May 27 confirmed that it had not been used at all this year. The bridge staff said that the falcons had not been present. Last year they fledged chicks from this box.

At Logan Airport a pair appeared to be interested in nesting on the central office portion of the control tower above the 19<sup>th</sup> floor on the southwest side. However, no evidence of a nest site could be found on a May 5 visit, although there was considerable whitewash from roosting adults. Permission has been granted for us to place a nest box on the south shoulder of the tower, and this should happen over the summer.

Although no falcon nest could be found, there was a nest somewhere nearby. On June 8, Norm Smith, raptor specialist from Massachusetts Audubon, saw an adult peregrine feeding an unbanded fledgling out on the airport field. About a week later he saw an adult with two unbanded fledglings.

### **Goliath Crane, Quincy Shipyard**

Last year this pair laid eggs right on the bare steel of the crane, and they did not hatch. This year it was more difficult to get permission to climb the crane, so by the time we visited (April 27), the pair had already laid and abandoned an egg on the east side of the crane. We left a nest tray near the 2003 nest site on the west side and returned to check it on June 8. The adults were very attached to the tray, but it did not contain eggs or chicks. A search revealed shells from a second egg on the east side and a broken egg with a well-developed embryo on the west side just under the tray. The adult female was the same bird as last year, but the male was new.

### **Braga Bridge (Interstate 195 over the Taunton River), Fall River**

The adult pair had been defending the vicinity of the nest box until about May 20, but when the nest box was visited on May 26, they were no longer present. Their apparent failure is almost certainly the result of intensive repair work that is being done under the bridge. Both last year and this year the pair apparently nested within the support beams of the bridge and not in the box. Unfortunately, the site was not observed sufficiently to locate the exact nest site on the bridge during either year. The repair work is scheduled to be completed by the end of the summer, so they should have a good chance for success next year.

### **Ideal Box Company (in an old mill building), Lawrence**

For the second year a pair of falcons nested on the sixth floor of this building. On May 24 we banded three three-week-old chicks (two male, one female). One of the chicks was later found on the ground when it was near fledging and was put up on the roof. All have now fledged.

### **An abandoned mill building behind the Tsongas Arena, Lowell**

This is the first mill building you pass if you take the river walk from behind the Tsongas Arena and walk upriver. The pair is said to have nested here last year as well. If you look at the building from the river walk, the male often sits on the large chimney, and the nest is inside a metal air exhaust pipe just a few windows to the right on the sixth floor. This building is now being renovated by the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, for a dormitory. On June 9 we banded two three-week-old chicks (two female). This exhaust pipe is too small for large chicks, so at five weeks of age they were moved to a box on the roof.

### **Mechanic Bank Building, Worcester**

This year, the nest box that had been placed on the west side of the eighth floor balcony of the old Mechanic Bank Building (120 Front Street) at the end of the Common was removed. After being present for four years, there was no evidence that a Peregrine had ever even looked at it. A new box was placed on the eleventh floor of the Fallon Health Building. However, when Worcester's first Peregrine nest was finally discovered, it was in an unused planter on the east side of the very same balcony that the old nest box had occupied.

On June 2 we banded four three-week-old chicks (two male, two female), but one of the females was picked up shortly after fledging with a wing injury. This bird was taken to the Tufts Wildlife Clinic, but will not be releasable.

### **Monarch Place Building, Springfield**

Three three-week-old chicks (one male, two female) were banded on May 25. They all fledged successfully. The Springfield community continues to be able to follow the progress of this nest on its local cable television network.

### **University of Massachusetts Library Tower, Amherst**

On June 5, we banded four three-week-old chicks (two male, two female). This is the second year that this site has produced chicks, and the second year for the current adult female. She was banded as a chick on a building in Manchester, New Hampshire. Among the prey found at this site were a Black-bellied Plover and a drake Ring-necked Duck.

### **Mount Sugarloaf, Deerfield**

On June 3 we checked this nest and found a clutch of four abandoned and rotten eggs at the 2003 nest site. Later the same day we observed the cliff for about an hour and saw the adult female enter another possible nest site farther to the north on the same cliff. We assumed they were renesting and decided to wait a week before checking this new site closely. On June 8 this site was checked and, to our surprise, we found egg shells, remains of prey, lots of whitewash, and lots of loose chick down, suggesting that a second clutch had already fledged. The adults were very defensive, but no chicks were seen. We would be very interested to know if anyone saw juvenile falcons or more than two falcons flying around this cliff.

In 2002 falcons at the Farley Cliffs in Erving raised chicks but have not used the cliff during the past two years. It is very possible that this pair moved to Mount Sugarloaf, which is about 13 air miles to the southwest of the Farley Cliffs.

### **Totals for 2004**

The total number of nesting pairs in the state was at least eleven, including the unlocated nest that produced the two unbanded young seen at Logan Airport. Nine of these successfully fledged young. Twenty-four young were banded, an additional two were seen at Logan, and at least one young fledged at Mount Sugarloaf, for a total of at least twenty-seven young from the nine successful nests.

This is by far the greatest number of Peregrine chicks fledged from Massachusetts nests since restoration began. In the previous four years, ten fledged from four successful nests in 2000, thirteen from four nests in 2001, eight from four nests in 2002, and fifteen from six nests in 2003. 🦅

*Tom French is an Assistant Director of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. He would like to thank the many people who continue to help MassWildlife with monitoring, banding, and rescue of grounded chicks, as well as with nest site maintenance. The falcons have benefited greatly from these efforts.*