Maryland Birdlife 65(2):4-9

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) Prey Items Found outside a State Office Building Complex in Baltimore, Maryland, August 1982 to March 1983

Robert F. Ringler

6272 Pinyon Pine Court, Eldersburg, Maryland 21784-4922
ringler.bob@gmail

In the fall of 1982, I routinely checked the sidewalks around the building in which I worked for dead birds from window collisions. This was at the Herbert R. O'Conor State Office Building at 201 W. Preston Street, Baltimore, Maryland. In the course of retrieving the dead birds, I started noticing parts of birds. I wondered if rodents were getting to the birds before I arrived until I saw a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) in the vicinity. If indeed it was the falcon catching some birds and leaving parts behind, I decided it would be interesting to know what it was eating. The bird appeared to be an adult male Peregrine Falcon, presumably the one known as "Ashley" (Therres et al. 1993) from the nesting pair on the USF&G building (currently Transamerica Tower) located at 100 Light Street in downtown Baltimore, approximately 1 mi (1.6 km) to the south. Ashley's primary roost site was on the northwest corner of the State Office Building at 301 W. Preston Street, on the corner of N. Eutaw and W. Preston Streets. The bird perched high, approximately 12 stories up, with its back to W. Preston Street. The presence of a substantial scattering of fecal matter on the sidewalk below attested to this. I sometimes saw the bird flying around the buildings, perched on other floors, or on the O'Conor Building.

METHODS

Each day before starting work at 8:00 a.m., I walked around the O'Conor Building searching for dead birds. Depending on the arrival time of my carpool, I spent 5 to 20 minutes looking for/at the remains. Occasionally, I went into work first to get things started, and then came back outside to look for remains. Observation times varied according to the amount of remains I found. I made note of the parts of birds that I found, as well as the species identification. After realizing the presence of the Peregrine Falcon, I expanded my search to the State Office Building at 301 W. Preston Street. I continued this routine through the fall migration season and briefly in the following spring of 1983 until the Peregrine was no longer seen.

RESULTS

In total, 26 dead bird or parts of these birds were found between 25 August 1982 and 15 March 1983. These represented 12 different species and one unknown warbler. Table 1 shows a list of the bird parts I found around the buildings and the identifications I made at the time. In most cases, these would be wings or heads that had been removed before the remainder was eaten. Northern Flicker comprised 23.1% (n = 6) of the birds killed by Ashley. In the case of one Northern Flicker found on 1 October 1982, the carcass was intact on its back with the entire breast and internal parts having been neatly removed. The second most frequent prey was Rock Pigeon which accounted for 19.2% (n = 5) of the birds killed.

Table 1. Bird parts found outside the Maryland State Office Building complex at 201 and 301 W. Preston Street, Baltimore, Maryland between 25 August 1982 and 15 March 1983).

Date	Common Name	Scientific Name	Body Part
25 August 1982	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	*Coccyzus americanus*	1 wing, part of tail
26 August 1982	Sora	*Porzana carolina*	head, other small remains
26 August 1982	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	wings, feet, other small parts
27 August 1982	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	wings, feet, sternum, tail (all in one piece)
30 August 1982	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	head
1 September 1982	Yellow-breasted Chat	*Icteria virens*	head
7 September 1982	Bay-breasted Warbler	*Setophaga castanea*	head
17 September 1982	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	*Pheucticus ludovicianus*	head, 1 wing of ♂
21 September 1982	Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	1 wing
25 September 1982	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	*Pheucticus ludovicianus*	head
28 September 1982	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	*Pheucticus ludovicianus*	head
28 September 1982	Ovenbird (?)	*Seiurus aurocapilla* (?)	1 wing
29 September 1982	Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	head of ♂
1 October 1982	Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	head
1 October 1982	Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	carcass
4 October 1982	Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	wings, bones, 1 leg
6 October 1982	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	feathers
13 October 1982	Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	1 wing
19 October 1982	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	*Pheucticus ludovicianus*	head, part of 1 wing of ♂
8 November 1982	Eastern Meadowlark	*Sturnella magna*	entire body with some breast feathers gone
8 November 1982	American Robin	*Turdus migratorius*	head
8 November 1982	American Robin	*Turdus migratorius*	head
12 November 1982	unknown warbler	Family Parulidae	wing
16 November 1982	Eastern Meadowlark	*Sturnella magna*	head
14 March 1983	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	miscellaneous parts
15 March 1983	American Woodcock	*Scolopax minor*	head

DISCUSSION

Ashley

My observations of bird parts at the Maryland State Office Building complex occurred from August to November 1982 and in March 1983. These observations coincided with the presence of Ashley in Baltimore (Therres et al. 1993) (Table 2). Ashley was banded (#816-09555) on 19 March 1982. Banding records state that this Peregrine was a third-year bird, was hand-raised, and wore a transmitter (Danny Bystrak, in litt. 18 August 2016). In 1982, Ashley was transported to Baltimore's USF&G building from The Peregrine Fund laboratory. [Note: Cade (2003) incorrectly reports the release date as 1983.] In December 1982, Ashley was wounded by a shotgun blast. After a rehabilitation period, the bird was released in February 1983 back at the USF&G building. On 18 April 1983, Ashley was found dead by a maintenance worker on the Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River. Death was due to vehicle impact on the roadway of the bridge (Glenn D. Therres, in litt. 17 August 2016).

Table 2. Timeline detailing Ashley's presence in Baltimore and the presence of prey items found outside the State Office Building complex at 201 and 301 W. Preston Street, Baltimore, Maryland (25 August 1982-15 March 1983).

Month	Ashley's Presence in Baltimore	Prey Item Presence at Office Building Complex
Pre-August 1982	Released at USF&G building	
August 1982	Free flying	Yes
September 1982	Free flying	Yes
October 1982	Free flying	Yes
November 1982	Free flying	Yes
December 1982	Found shot	
January 1983	In rehabilitation	
February 1983	Released at USF&G building	
March 1983	Free flying	Yes
April 1983	Found dead	

Prey Items

The list of observed bird parts (Table 1) shows a varied diet including a rail, a shorebird, and less-aquatic passerines and non-passerines. Bent (1938) lists a wide range of prey for Peregrine Falcons and states: "Probably the very largest and the very smallest birds on this list [Bent's list] are less often taken than those of intermediate size; pigeons, flickers, jays, meadowlarks, and other birds of similar size probably constitute the bulk of the food in inland localities . . ."

Because Northern Flickers were frequently taken, one can imagine the target a flicker's white rump would make for a Peregrine Falcon circling above. Because only 11.5% (N = 3) of the total birds taken (n = 26) were small warblers, it seems that Ashley preferred the larger-bodied migrants that were passing the buildings. There were few Rock Pigeons in the W. Preston Street area and it appears that Ashley cleared out most of these early in his residence here. Being an opportunist, an urban Peregrine Falcon can take whatever prey comes its way.

In other studies of urban Peregrine Falcons, Rock Pigeons were a predominant prey item. In a study of a nesting pair in Warsaw, Poland, Rejt (2001) found that 32% of their prey were Rock Pigeons. Rejt also documented seasonal differences in the percentages of pigeons in their diet (19.4% in spring, 50% in summer, 22.7% in autumn, and 51.5% in winter). During the spring and fall, migrant species were more prevalent in the Peregrines' diet. A study of a single pair of non-breeding (i.e., outside the breeding season) urban Peregrines in Florence, Italy found 30.4% of their prey to be Rock Pigeons (Serra et al. 2001). At an urban location in Kentucky, Rock Pigeons made up 75.4% (n = 46, N = 61) of the prey of Peregrines (Carter et al. 2003). Rock Pigeons comprised 41.9% (n = 2208, N = 5275) of prey of urban-dwelling Peregrines in a ten-year study in Bristol, Bath, and Exeter in southwest England (Drewitt and Dixon. 2008).

For almost 20 years, John Barber worked at Baltimore's USF&G building as "caretaker" for their nesting Peregrine Falcons (Barber 2003). His studies and publications (Barber 1989 [interspecific aggression], 1992 [prey]; Barber and Barber 1983 [prey], 1988 [prey]) furthered the knowledge about urban Peregrines. Several of his publications are pertinent to this paper. Barber and Barber (1983) reported on the prey of the USF&G female Peregrine named "Scarlett." Of 304 prey items, 91.1% (n = 277) were Rock Pigeons, followed by Northern Flickers (2.9%, n = 8). In my survey of 26 prey items, Northern Flickers and Rock Pigeons were the most numerous, 23.1% and 19.2% respectively. On one occasion, Barber and Barber (1983) observed Scarlett feeding on a window-killed American Woodcock. This behavior was a possibility in my survey but was never observed. On several occasions, Scarlett was known to feed several miles from the USF&G building (Barber and Barber 1983), so it is no surprise that Ashley would feed a mile from the nest site. A follow-up article by Barber and Barber (1988) of a subsequent pair of Peregrines at the USF&G building, showed that of the 472 prey items, the top five species were Rock Pigeons (31.4%, n = 148), Mourning Doves (*Zenaida macroura*; 15.3%, n = 72), European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*; 11.2%, n = 53), Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*; 7.6%, n = 36), and Northern Flickers (5.7%, n = 27). In my survey, only two of the top five Barber and Barber (1988) prey species were observed—Rock Pigeon and Northern Flicker. In all three surveys, these two

species were a prominent prey item. Additionally in a non-urban Maryland setting, Northern Flickers comprised 32.4% (n = 35, N = 108) of the prey of fall migrant Peregrine Falcons during a twelve-year survey at Assateague Island (Ward and Laybourne 1985). Interestingly, 91.4% of those flickers (n = 32) were taken by immature Peregrines.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Glenn D. Therres (Associate Director, Wildlife and Heritage Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Annapolis, MD) and Danny Bystrak (Wildlife Biologist, Bird Banding Laboratory, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, United States Geological Service, Department of the Interior, Laurel, MD) for providing banding information and historical data regarding Ashley. I also thank Jamie Holfeltz (Research Library Coordinator, The Peregrine Fund, Boise, ID) for providing pertinent information from Barber (2003) and Cade (2003).

LITERATURE CITED

Barber, J. 2003. Baltimore Peregrines. Page 321 in: Cade, T.J., and W. Burnham (Editors). *Return of the Peregrine: a North American saga of tenacity and teamwork*. The Peregrine Fund, Boise ID. 394 pp.

Barber, J.C. 1989. Interspecific aggression in urban Peregrine Falcons. *Maryland Birdlife* 45(4):134-135.

Barber, J.C. 1992. Unusual prey of urban Peregrine Falcons. *Maryland Birdlife* 48(2):74.

Barber, J.C., and M.M. Barber. 1983. Prey of an urban Peregrine Falcon. *Maryland Birdlife* 39(4):108-110.

Barber, J.C., and M.M. Barber. 1988. Prey of an urban Peregrine Falcon – Part II. *Maryland Birdlife* 44(2):37-39.

Bent, A.C. 1938. *Falco peregrinus anatum* Bonaparte, Duck Hawk. Pages 43-67 in: *Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey (Part 2)*. Smithsonian Institution, United States National Museum, Bulletin 170, Washington, DC. 482 pp.

Cade, T.J. 2003. Famous Eastern Peregrines. Pages 328-333 in: Cade, T.J., and W. Burnham (Editors). *Return of the Peregrine: a North American saga of tenacity and teamwork*. The Peregrine Fund, Boise ID. 394 pp.

Carter, K.M., M.J. Lacki, M.R. Dzialak, L.S. Burford, and R.O. Bethany. 2003. Food habits of Peregrine Falcons in Kentucky. *Journal of Raptor Research* 37(4):344-349.

Drewitt, E.J.A., and N. Dixon. 2008. Diet and prey selection of urban-dwelling Peregrine Falcons in southwest England. *British Birds* 101:58-67.

Rejt, L. 2001. Feeding activity and seasonal changes in prey composition of urban Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus*. *Acta Ornithologica* 36(2):165-169.

Serra, G., M. Lucentini, and S. Romano. 2001. Diet and prey selection of nonbreeding Peregrine Falcons in an urban habitat of Italy. *Journal of Raptor Research* 35(1):61-64.

Therres, G.D., S. Dawson, and J.C. Barber. 1993. *Peregrine Falcon Restoration in Maryland*. Maryland Department of Natural Resources; Fish, Heritage and Wildlife Administration; Wildlife Technical Publication 93-1. Annapolis, MD. 9 pp.

Ward, F.P., and R.C. Laybourne. 1985. A difference in prey selection by adult and immature Peregrine Falcons during autumn migration. *ICBP Technical Publication* 5:303-309.

Field Sketch of a Peregrine Falcon by Diane Ford

Drawn at the Governor Thomas Johnson Memorial Bridge on 17 May 2014. Maryland Ornithological Society Annual Conference, Solomons, Maryland. When the field trip arrived at the bridge, there was a nest high up under the span. A few seconds later, an adult Peregrine Falcon flew in and perched on the nest. The mate within the nest stood up and they exchanged places.