

OHIO'S FIRST RECORD OF BREEDING PEREGRINE FALCONS

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As probably every birder in Ohio already knows, downtown Toledo's Peregrine falcons provided Ohio with its first ever recorded breeding record during the spring and summer of 1988.

Events leading up to this nesting have been covered in considerable detail in previous issues. A chronology of noteworthy happenings of the Toledo Peregrines is presented below:

November, 1986 - immature female Peregrine is seen in downtown Toledo for the first time
March, 1987 - adult male Peregrine joins the female

January, 1988 - female Peregrine (unbanded) found dead on a downtown Toledo street
February, 1988 - a second immature female Peregrine joined the adult male

May, 1988 - nest discovered with two chicks on top of Commodore Perry building
July, 1988 - two young fledged from nest

A successful nesting of Peregrine falcons in Ohio is certainly a significant ornithological event. Research by Dennis Case, a non-game biologist in the Ohio Division of Wildlife, indicates that the Commodore Perry building nest represents only the the third known nesting for the U.S. between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. One of the previous nestings was in Tennessee and the other along the Mississippi River, each in the 19th century.

During recent years, Peregrine falcons have been introduced to a variety of U.S. cities. The Toledo situation is somewhat unique in that both the male and female found Toledo on their own. Each of the birds was banded; however, not much is known about the male bird as the band apparently was never able to be read. On the other hand, the bands on the female painted a fairly clear picture. The female Peregrine (dubbed "Nellie McClung" by the falcon handler who released her) was hatched on June 13, 1987 in Wainwright, Alberta and was then moved to a research station in Ontario. She was released in Font Hill, Ontario in July 1987 and is the only one of eight Peregrines released that day known to still be alive. Nesting by a subadult is apparently quite unusual, but not unprecedented.

The Peregrine falcons were observed by many each day in their downtown haunts, and it was becoming quite obvious in the spring that the birds were taking a liking to the Commodore Perry building which had been closed since 1986. On May 25, the nest was discovered by maintenance workers. It already had one recently hatched chick and possibly a second along with an egg (which never did hatch). The eggs had been laid in an old pigeon nest on a narrow ledge near the top of the building. Word of the Peregrine nesting spread quickly. The Blade ran a couple of front page articles with color pictures and even sponsored a name the falcon contest for the male Peregrine. (The eventual winner happened to be "Commodore Perrygrine".) Fortunately, a decision was made by building management to minimize disturbance of the nesting site. Only a few people were allowed access to the building top, and many felt that even this constituted excessive disturbance. Thankfully, a suggestion by one wildlife official to move the nest site to safer environs was not pursued.

Shortly after the nest was discovered, the local public TV station (WGTE) set up a camera on the nest and a monitor in its offices which allowed any and all interested downtowners to witness the progress of the Peregrine chicks.

In early July, about 40 days after hatching, the Peregrine young attempted their first flights. The Fourth of July weekend and the next several days were a bit harrowing for the young Peregrines as they encountered many of the hazards of downtown life. Each of the chicks was rescued from sidewalks and other predicaments by a group of volunteers who patrolled the downtown area to enhance the falcons' chances of survival.

The young and adults continued to be observed on and around the Commodore Perry building for a couple of weeks. As far as I know, there have not been any sightings of the young birds since. With any luck, they both survived and moved on. The only way we will know for sure of the young falcons' fate is through banding information returns. The adults are still being seen at least erratically in and around downtown Toledo. It appears that since breeding duties were completed, they are wandering away from the city (and probably along the shores of Lake Erie and the Maumee River) regularly.

It will be interesting to see if they try again next year.



Peregrine falcon on nest, downtown Toledo, Ohio, June 1988. Photograph by Steve Pollick, courtesy The Blade.