

## Woking Peregrine Project Update - 2018

This year's breeding season has been very eventful with more drama than an England penalty shoot out. For the the third consecutive year, the same adult pair have bred successfully, raising four juveniles (2 males / 2 females) so they've been able to fledge. More later on events that occurred next.....

I'm lucky to be able to watch the Woking peregrines most days as I work at the WWF Living Planet Centre which is within viewing distance of the nest site on Export House. The adult pair are resident all year but are seen more regularly when the breeding season starts during February. This year we had an added bonus when a new external PTZ (pan / tilt / zoom) camera was installed by Jason Fathers/Wildlife Windows on the service ladder that gives access to the north end stairwell ledge. This camera was used last year by Woking Borough Council and thanks to their Green Infrastructure Manager, Tracey Haskins, the Council arranged and paid for the camera's installation before the start of this year's breeding season.

From early January both adults were seen regularly perched at the north end of Export House, more often in front or near the nest box entrance. On the 2nd February the PTZ camera was installed and Craig Denford (WPP

webmaster) fired up the webcams on the 6th February. One of the first images from the new PTZ was an awesome view of the adult tiercel perched on the north end stairwell ledge - things are looking very good! I first saw the tiercel making a depression in the nest box substrate (via the nest cam) on the 9th February but it wasn't until the 3rd March copulation was first reported. An unusual sight via the south facing Ledge Cam occurred on the 23rd February; a very subdued but much alive lapwing on the ledge approximately 15 ft. from the nest box entrance. Craig managed to capture interesting webcam footage when the tiercel decided to have a closer look! The lapwing was last seen making a quick exit with the tiercel close behind.

March started well when I saw one of the resident adult peregrines give chase to a red kite above Jubilee Square. On the 6th March the tiercel was seen twice taking freshly caught prey to the falcon and both were seen in front or near the nest box. The PTZ camera gave unique views of the falcon feasting on a Moorhen on the 12th and at 22.45 she was seen sleeping in the nest box entrance via the nest cam. There was a false alarm on the 15th when the falcon was seen (via the nest cam) to be very agitated and showing signs of immanent egg

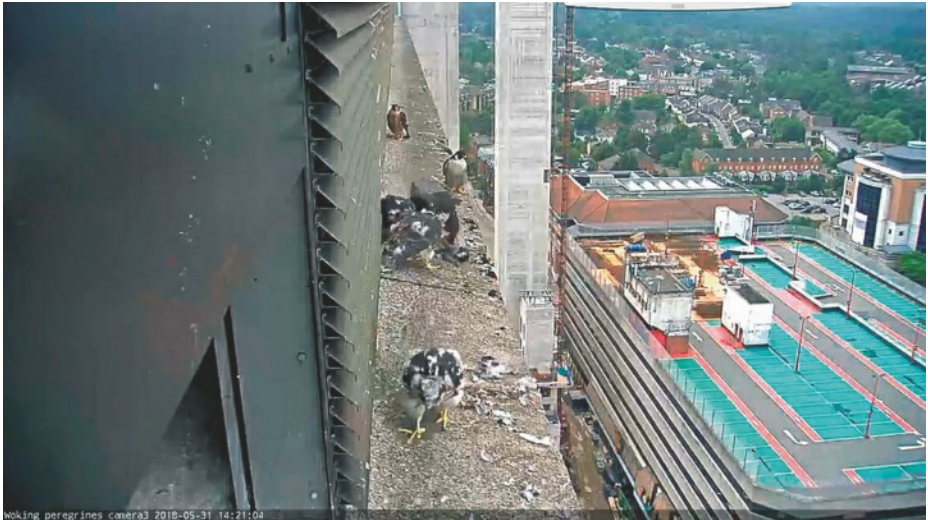


*Falcon, tiercel & 5 eggs, 12 Apr 2018  
(Woking Borough Council webcam)*

laying. (The tiercel spent much time looking into the nest box...) March 17th - the action has begun! First egg laid at approximately 17.00 and the second shortly before 08.00 on the 20th March. Both adults were seen taking turns at incubation during various times of the day. A further three eggs were laid on; 22nd March (before 09.00), 24th March (approx. 05.00) and 26th March (approx. 10.30) Later in the day, both of the resident adults were seen to chase of a third adult peregrine - impressive team work as each took turns dive bombing the escaping interloper. The new PTZ camera showed its full potential on the 28th when Craig was able to zoom in on the tiercel's B.T.O. leg ring whilst it was feeding on the north end stairwell ledge. The letters and first two numbers were clearly seen but annoyingly the all important remaining numbers remained hidden - but we did see 'London'. This means the Woking tiercel had its leg ring attached somewhere in the UK. (The Woking tiercel has no additional coloured leg ring and the resident falcon has no leg rings)

During the first part of April, both adults were seen taking turns at incubating their five eggs and up until 17.00 on the 26th all eggs were seen to be intact. I spoke with Nick Dixon (<http://www.urbanperegrines.co.uk/>) that day and he mentioned the eggs of the breeding peregrines in Bath had started to hatch on the 25th April. Their eggs had been laid on approximately the same dates as the Woking peregrines. On the 27th, Nick phoned me and said he'd heard (via the Nest Cam ) a chick calling at approximately 11.00. A later website screen grab confirmed one of the eggs had started to hatch! By the 28th, three more eggs had hatched. The last egg was reported to have hatched on the 29th but the adults didn't incubate this chick with its siblings. It died later presumably because it couldn't thermo regulate its body temperature.

There was some welcome publicity when 'That's Surrey TV' broadcast a WPP news report on the 18th May; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TzFXfvImBQ&feature=youtu.be&a=> and it was then used by 'BBC Surrey' radio. (Chris Packham makes it look easy...) A date was arranged by Richard Denyer to fit the juveniles with their leg rings and this was carried out on the 22nd, watched by Surrey Bird Club's B.T.O. rep, Penny Williams. By the 29th at least one of the juveniles had started to venture outside the nest box and on the 30th three had the urge to explore the nearby ledge. This often cause much



*Falcon, tiercel & 4 juveniles, 31 May 2018 (Woking Borough Council webcam)*

concern with website viewers but the young ones come prepared with a good set of very sharp talons and no fear of heights. The last day of the month saw all four juveniles and both adults on the ledge near the nest box - an awesome sight made more memorable when the adult falcon chased off an inquisitive red kite.

No year is the same when you're able to have intermit views of the peregrines' breeding cycle - June this year has been a good example. I took my first set of photos this year on the 3rd and managed to add a group shot of all four juveniles, seen from Jubilee Square whilst I was helping with the Surrey Bird Club stand on the 9th. I didn't know at the time but this could have been the last photo taken showing all four youngsters grouped together. On the 10th, one of the juvenile females had a bad landing

on a window sill, eight floors up on the west side of Export House. The impact was fortunately heard by two peregrine enthusiasts who were on the top floor of the Peacocks car park; Hugo Wilson ( @HugoJWilson ) and Jamie Gordon - a WWF colleague. The juvenile was seen to land at the base of Export House, near some ventilation units, but appeared to have difficulty flapping its wings. Hugo and Jamie could see it was in distress and had the good idea of contacting Wildlife Aid who are based in Leatherhead

- <https://www.wildlifeaid.org.uk/> They arrived very quickly and managed to retrieve the young female. Had it stayed where it was, there was a strong possibility it could have been killed by a fox. (Foxes are known to scavenge here on prey remains discarded by the local peregrines) We had an update from Wildlife Aid on



*Juvenile female release, 29 Jun 2018  
(James Sellen)*

the 11th advising the female was being assessed and could be in care for up to three weeks. A suspected damaged / broken clavicle bone could heal by itself if the peregrine was kept in a temporary cage or an operation may be needed. As it turned out, confined rest worked wonders helped by the dedicated staff and volunteers of this excellent Foundation. On the 18th I was lucky to see two food passes within 10 minutes, from the Peacocks car park, between an adult and one or more juvenile peregrines. This is a privileged view of the adults training their offspring how to catch prey in flight. Very frustrating as well - on this occasion no camera! I decided another photo session was needed and during a lunch break on the 22nd I struck lucky - food pass seen and photographed above the Peacocks car park - awesome!! Wildlife Aid advised the juvenile female would be released from the top floor of the Peacocks car park on the 29th at 10.00. Debbie Hickman (Marketing Communications Officer at Woking Borough Council and dedicated volunteer at Wildlife Aid)

arranged for 'That's Surrey TV' to cover this unique event ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZowkf\\_fqb4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZowkf_fqb4)). Simon Cowell (Wildlife Aid's CEO and founder) arrived and placed a large transportation box on the roof of his car. From a respectful distance, we watched as he slowly opened the door to reveal the back of the young peregrine. It seemed to take a while before it realised freedom was beckoning but when it turned round it shot out giving an outstanding view of its new found flight skills. After it flew past the lower floors of Export House it was seen to fly high and fast behind the new buildings being constructed south of the car park. As we watched, it was approached by another peregrine, possibly one of the resident adults, which made several stoops at the inexperienced youngster. I was a little concerned and knew further observations were needed to try and work out what may be occurring.

On the 4th and 5th of July, I was watching the peregrines from the Peacocks car park and saw what I thought was aggressive behaviour between both adults and one of the juveniles. On the 5th I couldn't be sure I was watching the recently released juvenile female but the adult tiercel made several attempts to push the youngster off the ledge near the nest box. When it eventually flew, the adult tiercel gave chase and it was quickly joined by the adult falcon. She flew past two of the other



*Adult Falcon and juvenile,*  
22 Jun 2018 (James Sellen)

juveniles, who were circling above Export House, and joined the adult tiercel. Both adults then took turns at stooping at the fleeing juvenile which regularly rolled onto its back showing its talons. Not a good sign. Both adults weren't seen to make contact with the juvenile but appeared to be forcing it lower down until they all disappeared from view slightly north of Jubilee Square. I was on leave the following week but on the 16th and 17th two juveniles were seen near the nest box with one of the adults. The 18th of July proved to be very eventful. At 10.30 I had a phone call from Craig - he was photographing a juvenile peregrine on level one / yellow zone of the Peacocks car park and thought I should have a look. When I arrived, the juvenile was trying to feed on the remains of a pigeon in the middle of the car park's access route. Several cars managed to drive around it before Craig and I persuaded it to fly a very short distance onto a nearby low wall. We picked up the carcass and left it very close to the peregrine. It stayed on the wall and allowed us to get within 5ft.

It's plumage was very unkempt and its eyes looked partially closed. She made no attempt to fly and gave the impression that she didn't have the will or energy to move. I decided to phone Wildlife Aid for some advice and they suggested we should catch the juvenile and take it to Leatherhead..... I have no experience of catching or handling wild peregrines but remembered some advice Nick Dixon once told me - have a jacket and a suitable box handy! I made a quick phone call to Martin Pooley who over sees the management and security of Export House and the neighbouring car parks. Within 10 minutes he joined me in the car park armed with a large box / old jacket and arranged for the area to be cordoned off. I explained what we needed to do and warned the juvenile's talons are exceptionally sharp.... he looked a little nervous. I tried to coax her off the low wall but she decided to fly the short distance to the car park's red zone. After landing on a vertical wall, she managed to clamber over it and fall on to a walkway within the car park. Having relocated her, Martin approached from behind (armed with the jacket) and I tried to distract her from the front. The plan worked; Martin dropped the jacket over her and she was bundled into the box! Once secured, we made some air holes and phoned the Council offices. Debbie Hickman arrived with a colleague and they took the peregrine to Wildlife Aid. We had an update from Wildlife Aid on the 20th - she was still alive

and was being assessed by the Foundation's vet.

At the time of writing this report, Debbie visited Wildlife Aid on the 25th July and had a good chat with the vet. It seems our suspicions were confirmed; the juvenile had sustained an attack most probably from one of the adult peregrines and suffered two lacerations caused by talons. One was to the neck and the other more serious wound was in the shoulder. An operation had been carried out to stitch the wounds and the vet advised she had no intentions of putting her to sleep unless the injuries made no attempt to heal. The WPP group were also concerned if the juvenile was released again near Export House, she may sustain more serious injuries. The vet had similar reservations and advised the juvenile would need a greater spell of rehabilitation if she recovered from her injuries. It's possible the juvenile could be sent to The Hawk Conservancy for specialist treatment and it seems very unlikely she'll be released back into the wild.

Much of this year's breeding action has been enjoyed by many people viewing the WPP website. From the 6th February to the beginning of July, there were a total of 29,080 views from 25 different countries including; UK (26,823 views), USA (490 views), Malta (60 views), Philippines (48 views), Peru (23 views) and Hungary (16 views) The viewing numbers peaked on the 30th April =

1,621. A selection of photographs taken this year can also be seen on the website's 'Gallery' page; <http://www.wokingperegrines.com/gallery/>

Surrey Bird Club had another successful series of public engagement events in Woking's Jubilee Square, professionally organised again by Charlotte Gray. They took place on; Sunday May 20th, Tuesday May 29th, Saturday 9th June and Saturday 16th June with help of the following SBC volunteers; Charlotte Gray, Richard Denyer, Carolyn Watkins, Steve Chastell, Penny Williams, Eric Soden, Marilyn Frame, Peter Bryant, Simon Stacey, Ken Anckorn, Debbie Hodges, Carey Lodge, Phil Delamont and James Sellen. This an excellent way of promoting the Club's valuable conservation work, recruiting new members and educating the public about peregrines. Many Woking residents said they love having these raptors in town and numerous children mentioned they now have 'Peregrine TV' at school, being shown the live webcam whilst in class!

As with the previous two years, the Woking Peregrine Project has again had the help of many enthusiastic people and generous organisations. On behalf of the WPP group, I would like to pass on our grateful thanks.

*James Sellen*  
*Woking Peregrine Project*