

Working for wild Birds of Prey and their Habitats

Press Release

Norwich Cathedral Peregrine Chicks Prepare to Fly the Nest

We are at Day 35: All is well with the four chicks. With regular feeding they are growing well and showing no signs of ailments or other problems. The threat of predation is receding the bigger they grow and as they develop more feathers they become more able to withstand the rigours of the weather without parental care.



The chicks watch their parents fly past. Photo: Hawk and Owl Trust

President | Chris Packham

Registered Charity No 1068565

A Company Limited by Guarantee in England No 3254207

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We should at this stage refer to the chicks as 'eyasses'. The term Eyass [pronounced eye-ass] is an old 15th century falconry word derived from French 'niais' and describes a young hawk that is still in the nest.

Although still showing copious amounts of down, feather development is well underway now and they are starting to show their juvenile plumage. By the time it comes to fledging their feathering pattern will broadly resemble that of an adult peregrine but be less defined and far more speckled. They will still have some down and do not get their adult plumage until they moult in the spring of next year.

We expect the chicks to take their first flight in just over one weeks time, around 12th June. Last year both young peregrines fledged on the same day, some 42 days after the first chick hatched. Between now and then there will be lots of wing exercising which will become more and more vigorous. This culminates in what is known as 'helicoptering' where the eyass is able to generate enough 'lift' from its flapping to raise itself off the ground slightly. Heart-stopping moments for the observers at the watchpoint and of the webcam, particularly as they may well be standing on the edge of the platform by then.

Although this is a necessary precursor to actual flight there is clearly potential for danger here. A gust of wind, a clash of wings with one of its siblings engaged in similar activities or over-enthusiasm combined with yet-to-be-learned flight control skills can bring premature fledging. This is not an uncommon event and happens in the wild. It doesn't necessarily result in the bird becoming injured in its descent to ground – or wherever – but it may not have the strength to take off again and return to the nest, or a place of safety where the parent can look after it. For the Hawk and Owl Trust, finding these AWOL avians, particularly in an urban environment, is often a difficult task. The chick may have landed several hundred metres from the spire and on a rooftop, out of sight from the ground. Watchpoint volunteer Jan Smith is on standby:

'We man the WatchPoint on a daily basis and are keeping a very close eye on those chicks! We have a contingency plan in place and should anything happen, we will do our best but this is a dangerous time for young peregrines.

Housemaster, Mr John Fisher and the pupils of Norwich School, in Cathedral Close, are very observant and involved with the peregrines and keep their eyes peeled. They will probably be the first ones to let us know if there is a problem.'

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All this activity in the nest means that it is an excellent time to see the eyasses in the flesh – or should that be feather? Consequently, our dedicated stalwarts who give their time so generously to staff the Watch Point on the Cathedral Green have decided to keep it open until 7pm next Tuesday (11th June). This should give those of you that cannot visit during the day a rare opportunity to come along and see these magnificent wild birds with your own eyes. No need for binoculars. Thanks to the good people at Viking Optical we have some rather nice 'scopes' for those that want to get a really close look.

See the live webcam at www.hawkandowl.org.

Press enquiries: Lin Murray 07881 657 944 lin.murray@hawkandowl.org

There are pictures of the peregrines on the cathedral available in high resolution. We have avi video available from the webcam.

Quotes available from Leanne Thomas Education Officer Hawk and Owl Trust 01328 856 788

Please note: Copies of stills of the chicks available but as they have been taken from the CCTV system they are not available in high resolution.

Notes to editors:

Hawk and Owl Trust

Founded in 1969 to help save the peregrine, in serious decline due to the effects of pesticides and persecution, the Hawk and Owl Trust is a national charity which now works for the conservation and appreciation of all wild birds of prey and their habitats – both in its nature reserves (such as Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature Reserve near Fakenham) and in partnership with others. Working with communities and other organisations, farmers, foresters and landowners, the Trust researches, restores and manages nesting, roosting and feeding habitats and encourages greater understanding and appreciation of these very special birds.

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