



Lin Murray
Press Officer
Hawk and Owl Trust
M: 07781 657 944
E: lin.murray@hawkandowl.org
W: www.hawkandowl.org

Working for wild Birds of Prey and their Habitats

Press Release

Hawk and Owl Trust Urban Peregrine Project

Norwich Cathedral

It's now Day 12 of the 34 or so days of incubation and we were all expecting a fairly quiet week. For the first nine tenths that's more or less what we were getting. The male and female peregrines coming and going, sharing the incubation of their clutch of four eggs and generally getting on with the usual rituals of life. The male would hunt for food and now and again pass it to his partner in a spectacular mid-air manoeuvre, both birds hollering at each other at the top of their lungs. Unlike last year the weather has been mild too, with several days hitting the mid-teens of temperature so the peregrines didn't have the added burden of dealing with cold wind or heavy rain. All was going along swimmingly in fact – until a couple of days ago that is.

Many of you will remember the tense excitement of a few weeks ago when a young female peregrine, toting an orange colour-ring with the identification letters 'DP', made an appearance at the Cathedral. With the help of our good friends at the BTO the bird was traced to a nest site in east London where it was ringed in 2012. At that time she made something of a kerfuffle when she took a great deal of interest in the nest box, apparently for her own uses. However, she was eventually seen off – or so we thought.

Not so. On Saturday (5th) she made a dramatic return, coming to the nest box and flushing the male who was doing his stint of incubation of the 4 eggs. With the male gone the intruding female spotted the egg clutch and examined them carefully, first marshalling them as though she would incubate them herself, then, worryingly, tapping them with her open beak giving the impression she was toying with the idea of breaking them. We will never know for sure what was going through her mind of course but at this time of year, when peregrines who have not found a mate or a nest site still have reproductive hormones coursing through their veins, almost anything could happen.

Now peregrines are not known for being timid but when in the box he was faced with the reality that 'DP' was a much bigger bird than he, it was clearly a contest that he wasn't going to win. Not in the nest box at least. Being smaller and lighter he should be more agile in the air, and so when the intruder eventually left the nest, encouraged to do so by a couple of high speed low passes over her head, the contest became more even. The male then hassled, harried and harangued the intruder time and time again in noisy, high

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Chairman | Mr Philip Merricks

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Taunton, TA4 3WH | T: 0844 984 282

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speed swoops across the sky above the cathedral. Nevertheless 'DP' was persistent, coming to the nest a further three times in under 15 minutes and paying some more attention to the eggs.



Intruder 'DP' surveys the eggs!

If this wasn't enough, a 3rd, and maybe a 4th unknown peregrine was seen flying around the Cathedral at the same time. One was a young bird and may have been one of last year's chicks but we were not able to positively identify it. Both got short shrift from the resident adult even though his main attention was on ousting 'DP'.

Eventually, with onlookers on the ground holding their breath and turning blue, DP flew away. Only to return again briefly yesterday, Tuesday 8 April. Both the Norwich birds took to the air as she approached and saw her off before she could reach the nesting platform. And so the drama continues...



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With all this going on it was fortuitous that the Hawk and Owl Trust Watch Point had been set up on the Cathedral Green again only a few days before. The team there were able to get a good view of what was happening above them and fill in the gaps of activity that wasn't seen on the webcams. Needless to say, the visiting public were also treated to a special, albeit dramatic, flying display too.

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The Watch Point is open from 10am to 5pm every day now until the end of June. Here we are able to give the visiting public close-up views of the peregrines through some great telescopes kindly sponsored by local optics company Viking Optical. It's free too, although much needed donations are always welcome. The response has already been high with some visitors coming from far and wide. One in particular –

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Wendy - came from Tasmania, about as far away from Norwich as you can get. She told us that her kids watch the webcam at home too!

Ends.

For more images, video clips, information or interviews please contact:

Lin Murray

07881 657 944

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Notes to editors:

Hawk and Owl Trust

Founded in 1969 to help save the rapidly declining peregrine, 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 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. www.hawkandowl.org

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