



Lin Murray
Press Officer
Hawk and Owl Trust
Sculthorpe Moor Nature Reserve
M: 07881 657 944
E: lin.murray@hawkandowl.org
W: www.hawkandowl.org

Working for wild Birds of Prey and their Habitats

Chicks Hatch for the Peregrine Falcons in Bath City Centre

After 36 days of incubation the peregrine falcon chicks of 2015 have started to hatch at the nesting platform on St John's Church in Bath city centre. So begins a very busy time for the parent birds.

It is not possible to identify the sex of the new chicks at this stage, but all information such as sex and weight will be recorded when the chicks are given their identification rings. British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) registered members Ed Drewitt and Hamish Smith will place two small unique identity rings on the chicks' legs when they are 'ringed' later this month. A special license is required to perform this task as peregrines are a protected species and it is illegal to interfere with them.

Hamish Smith, Bath Urban Peregrine Project coordinator said:

"As a species, the peregrine has progressively adapted its lifestyle to allow it to be successful in a number of habitats. Although a growing peregrine population in our cities may at first appear a bizarre development, by substituting cliffs for churches and other tall buildings, moorland for parks and playing fields, and the coastline for rivers or canals, it begins to make sense. The urban peregrine is a worldwide phenomenon with growing populations in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia. Through its Urban Peregrine Projects, the Hawk and Owl Trust is collecting invaluable data on the feeding and breeding ecology of these magnificent birds. This is being employed to inform research, conservation and education, as well as just the pure enjoyment of watching and listening to these fabulous wild creatures."

Here is a link to a video clip of the newly hatched chicks being fed:

<http://youtu.be/POW5wDHeKzs>



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As the chicks grow their food demands will increase significantly, leading to spectacular mid-air food transfers between the parent birds. These aerial acrobatics can be seen from South Parade in Bath or the Riverside Walk adjacent to Bath cricket ground. Members of the Bath Urban Peregrine team will be on hand at the Riverside Walk Watch Point each Sunday from 1130 to 1300 to answer any questions. They will also have spotting scopes and binoculars available so you can get a close up view of the peregrines. You can also watch the chicks as they grow via live feed on the Bath Urban Peregrine Project Website - upp.hawkandowl.org/bath-peregrines where there are also links to the main Hawk and Owl Trust website and their other conservation projects.

Ever wondered what happens to the chicks once they fledge? Often the chicks are driven from the area before the start of the following breeding season, and we rarely see them again as they disperse. So, imagine our surprise when a female peregrine that hatched at Bath St Johns RC Church on 8 May 2013, identified by her blue ring marked 'GA', fitted as part of researcher Ed Drewitt's colour ring project, was spotted last week above the Hawk and Owl Trust's other nest platform on Norwich Cathedral. The name 'peregrine falcon' literally means 'Wandering Falcon' so GA has certainly lived up to her name by wandering the 178 miles, although it is unlikely she did it 'as the crow flies'!

Ends.

For more images, information or interviews please contact:

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Notes to editors:

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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 Shapwick Moor on the Somerset Levels) 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.

Peregrines were first observed regularly in Bath about 14 years ago. After three years of peregrine residence without any indication of successful breeding, the Hawk and Owl Trust designed, built and installed the nest platform on the spire at St John Church, one of the peregrines' favourite roost sites. The birds first bred in 2006, and have successfully hatched and reared young every spring since.

Before the 2014 breeding season started, the Hawk and Owl Trust's Bath and West Wiltshire Group modified the nest box and installed a camera system. An extension to the front of the nest box was added with an integrated perch, primarily to provide more room for the young birds to exercise before they fly the nest. The adult birds have really taken to the new perch, their new 'patio' as the locals have named it.

Between 25 March and 1 April this year, the resident breeding pair at Bath has produced four eggs and both are busy with sharing the incubation. During this period, the male will take the lead in hunting and feeding his mate. This provides some fantastic viewing for those watching the birds from South Parade or the riverside walk, as the pair will indulge in aerial food passes directly overhead.