

Peregrines at Derby Cathedral

This project is a partnership between Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Derby Cathedral and Derby Museum & Art Gallery.

Summary of the story so far:

2004

Autumn: A pair of peregrines started to use the cathedral tower for roosting and feeding on.

2005

Early in 2005: the Trust was invited to identify the prey remains found on the pavements below.

Spring 2005: the pair displayed but left the tower in the absence of a suitable nesting ledge.

Summer 2005: The birds re-appeared and were seen through the autumn and winter.

A wide range of prey was identified (see below).

2006

Spring: the female adopted a tiny crevice as a possible (but impossible) nest site

April 5th: to facilitate egg-laying, a special nest platform was fixed to the east side of the tower

which the birds quickly adopted. Three eggs were soon laid.

End of May: the eggs hatched.

On 15th June: the three chicks were ringed by licenced ringers.

7-9th July: the three youngsters fledged though one had to be rescued from a nearby car park!

2007

February: web camera's fitted to the nest platform to enable world-wide viewing of the breeding

season via the internet. A diary or blog was also set up.

April: four eggs were laid and two hatched.

June: the two chicks grew well and fledged successfully by the end of the month.

2008

February: Nick Moyes adds a third web cam (the 'pud cam') which views the top of the gargoyles above the nest platform.

March/April: Four eggs are laid, a week earlier than last year.

May/June: The chicks hatch, grow quickly and fledge before the end of June. Three have to be rescued from city streets. One (the only female) disappears, presumed dead, shortly after fledging. The three males eventually move away.

Autumn: the parent birds continue to use the tower as their base for hunting and roosting. They also indulge in some nest scraping during October. These birds are intermittently visible on the web cams.

2009

February: The nest was cleaned out and cameras realigned mid-month. The parent birds had already begun the early stages of courtship and nest preparation even when there was snow lying on the nest. Lengthening daylight was clearly having an effect on their hormones.

March: Early in the month, nest scraping was observed and also the strange head-bowing posture adopted by the male (see video clips on the blog). With luck, we expect the first egg to be laid before the end of the month. Each year as they get older, they start a bit earlier.

What do the peregrines eat?

Over **40 species of prey** have been identified so far.

The adult birds fly out of Derby, hunting perhaps up to 15 miles away.

But they also use the **floodlighting** to catch birds passing over the city **at night!**

How else would they catch such night-fliers as **woodcock, quail, water rail and little grebe?**

This behaviour has been observed elsewhere in the world at other urban nest sites, eg in France, Poland (Warsaw), Taiwan and in The States.

The prey list so far:

Little grebe	Moorhen	Water rail
Quail	Golden plover	Whimbrel
Lapwing	Redshank	Woodcock
Snipe	Jack snipe	Dunlin
Knot	Turnstone	Bar tailed godwit
Black tailed godwit	Ruddy duck	Tufted duck
Mallard	Gadwall	Teal
Black headed gull	Common tern	Arctic tern*
Fieldfare	Redwing	Blackbird
Song thrush	Mistle thrush	Starling
Jay	Swift	Feral pigeon
Wood pigeon	Stock dove	Great spotted woodpecker
Greenfinch	Goldfinch	Pied wagtail
Robin	Waxwing	Little owl
Brown rat		

* The arctic tern corpse, found in July 2007 on the nave roof below the nest, was carrying a Swedish ring which had been put on the bird as a chick five years earlier in 2002. This species migrates down to the Antarctic each winter, so that bird (and its ring) had probably flown about 100,000 miles before the peregrines killed it. There was passage of some 80 arctic terns through south Derbyshire at the end of April 2007 and it seems likely that this bird was killed then.