

Dispelling the Myths - Peregrine Falcon Questions & Answers
Town Hall Meeting – February 17th 2009

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - We haven't had our windows washed for over a year because of the falcons, does this mean our windows won't be washed this year?

A - Windows on the side of the building closest to the nest can be washed outside of the active territorial season of the pair of peregrines. The safest periods of the year are post fledgling (late July) through the end of February. Windows far removed from the nest can be washed throughout the year, usually without territorial defence behavior being expressed by the peregrines.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - Am I going to be deprived of the enjoyment of sitting on my balcony because the birds nest here?

A - During some periods of the nesting season (particularly fledge watch), the falcons have heightened alert levels, and are more wary of people on balconies, especially if a fledgling was nearby. For the most part, residents can enjoy their balconies as usual. People with balconies close to the nest ledge just need to be more cautious than others during the fledging period. The falcons don't have much interest in people, unless perceived as a threat, and in 2008 many folks used their balconies without incident. If you are still concerned, balcony coverings like bead curtains, may be considered as a preventative solution.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - We heard that falcons are dangerous, how many times have they attacked people in Ontario?

A - Our local experience in the GTA has included an individual having their hat knocked off and another person was hit in the hand. Falcons are typically not known for directly attacking people, and their attacks are usually limited to people who are directly meddling with the nest. Their aggressive behavior is in defence of the nest and young. The territorial behavior has a limit and with most peregrines, they will swoop towards the intruder without actually making contact. Rarely does a peregrine make contact when an intruder is near the nest. This particular adult female tends to swoop an intruder and come no closer than about 10 feet.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - Why do certain birds seem to have more rights than people?

A - The consideration of rights between birds and people does not exist.

Legislation is written to protect species at risk in Ontario while also recognizing the need to protect public safety. Public safety is paramount and where birds create a significant risk to people, provisions within Ontario's Endangered Species Act allows for human intervention. The pair of peregrines at this site have not imposed a risk to public safety. They have, however, caused a perceived risk for a few individuals that regard their presence as a nuisance.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - Why is it so important to protect a threatened species?

The peregrine falcon is one of the most widely distributed birds in the world, occurring over large portions of each continent except Antarctica. That said, due to its preference for large territories, it was never a particularly common bird anywhere. However, populations historically remained quite stable, until a sudden and severe decline began in the 1950s. In less than twenty years, the peregrine became extirpated from much of its range, and was barely clinging to existence in most of the remainder. Although the peregrine is no longer at immediate risk of extinction, neither is its recovery advanced enough yet to leave it to fend entirely for itself. A "threatened" species is one that is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is very important to protect threatened species so that they do not become endangered.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - Our baby falcons didn't survive even with our help, can we make a difference?

A - The Peregrine Falcon has been in a recovery phase for many years. One of the biggest hurdles to the recovery of this species has been the high mortality rate associated with first year birds. As many as 80% of first-year fledglings do not make it, and so in some years, complete nest failure can occur. In other years, better survival rates are seen. Over the period of several years, a pair can produce sufficient numbers of young to allow the population to gradually grow.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - Do Peregrine falcons eat small children, cats or dogs?

A - While falcons have been known to "buzz" dogs and cats if they're perceived as a threat in the territory, Peregrine falcons do not pursue mammals as prey. Peregrine's primary source of food is pigeons.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - The falcons make a lot of loud squawking noises, sometimes while flying around, why?

A - Alarm calls are often heard from adult Peregrines, especially when an intruder is in their vicinity. The intruder may be a hawk or vulture, which the falcons can see from far distances, and Peregrines will defend their territory from intruders. While people are not generally perceived as threats when below the falcons, a person on the roof or near the nest could certainly be deemed a threat.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - The falcons protect their territory, but seemed more aggressive at some times than others, why?

A - When eggs or young are present, or when fledglings are taking first flights, the adults become far more agitated and aggressive. They are more alert, more sensitive to threats, and more protective of their young than they are at other times of the year. In the fall and winter by comparison, they rarely even bother to defend their territory.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - We noticed an absence of songbirds near the nest, were they all eaten by the falcons?

A - Songbirds were noted in other areas of the property away from the falcon's nesting area, but avoided higher tree limbs near the nest. Given recorded observations, very few if any songbirds were eaten in 2008.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q - How fast can Peregrines fly?

Peregrine falcons are the fastest bird on record, and in a dive have been recorded at speeds of 160-400 km/h. On the web, see: <http://www.extremescience.com/fastinworld.htm>

For the ongoing status of our resident falcons, see the following web site:

<http://www.asic.ca/peregrinefalcons>