

Species Action Plan

Peregrine Falcon



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“The City has, alas, an even slenderer claim than Salisbury to the honour of so magnificent a bird nesting” (Richard Fitter, 1949)

1. Aim

- To assist the colonisation of London by peregrines, so that current and future generations of Londoners have the opportunity to see this magnificent bird over their city.

2. Introduction

Happily, the above quote from Richard Fitter's famous book *London's Birds* is no longer true. The peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) with its steel-grey back and barred underparts is indeed a magnificent bird, renowned as perhaps the fastest animal in the world when stooping on its prey. It has captured the imagination of people throughout its world-wide range. To own a peregrine was a status symbol among British and European nobility in past times and it is a highly sought-after species among falconers today.

3. Current Status

The peregrine falcon is currently colonising London as part of a national recovery from serious declines in the middle of the 20th century, caused largely by poisoning from organochlorine pesticides such as DDT. The current UK population is estimated to be 1,402 breeding pairs (BTO National Peregrine Survey, 2002).

Largely a cliff-nesting species throughout its world range, peregrines are now taking to nesting on large buildings in urban areas. In the UK, peregrines nest on bridges, gasometers, pylons and a variety of buildings, often in artificial nest-boxes. The 2002 BTO survey identified 62 man made sites (i.e. buildings, bridges and pylons) across the UK where peregrines were breeding.

In London, the peregrine has always been a scarce passage migrant and winter visitor, though records show an increase in their numbers over recent years. Both the inner Thames marshes and the reservoirs of the Lee Valley and south-west London are important feeding areas for visiting peregrines in winter.

Although there are unconfirmed reports of peregrines having nested on St Paul's cathedral in the 1860s, the first pair to breed in modern times was probably the pair that fledged two young in 1998 on the derelict Spillers Millennium Mills building in the Royal Docks. Although single birds and pairs have subsequently frequented Beddington Farmlands (Sutton); the Wetland Centre, Barnes; Bankside Power Station (now Tate Modern) and the nearby Kings Reach Tower, no breeding was recorded until a pair bred successfully at Battersea Power Station in 2000. A pair has bred successfully on the site every year since.

In 2003, in addition to successful breeding at Battersea, there was one other confirmed breeding attempt in central London (albeit unsuccessful), unconfirmed breeding in the Greenwich Peninsula/Canary Wharf area and pairs present in Barking and Croydon. Just outside Greater London, a pair has nested for the last four years on Littlebrook Power Station, Dartford.

4. Specific Factors Affecting the Species

4.1 Nature of urban nest sites

Peregrines do not build a nest, but make a shallow scrape if there is soft substrate available. Although there are plenty of suitable buildings for peregrines in Thames-side locations throughout London, soft substrate is usually lacking. This could lead to eggs rolling off ledges or being otherwise damaged. The provision of nest boxes or trays containing a layer of soft substrate can help solve this problem.

Young peregrines taking their first flight can usually scramble back up a natural cliff to return to their nest, or at least to a place of safety. The smooth vertical face of a building allows no such opportunity and may result in half-fledged young birds becoming stranded in the street. Careful design and positioning of nest boxes may reduce the incidence of this.

4.2 Illegal persecution

Illegal persecution may be a significant factor slowing the increase in peregrine populations. Egg-collectors and unscrupulous falconers will rob nests and occasionally nests are damaged or destroyed to prevent perceived losses of game birds or racing pigeons. Although such persecution is less likely in urban areas, security of peregrine nest-sites is an important consideration, especially when selecting a location for a nest box.

4.3 Food

Food is plentiful in London, where feral pigeons, waders and a wide variety of passerine prey are present year round, with increased numbers of birds utilising the Thames and London's lakes and reservoirs.

5. Current Action

5.1 Legal status

In the UK the peregrine is afforded full protection as a Schedule 1 breeding species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended). It is also listed on Appendix II of the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, 1979; Appendix II of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, 1979; and as a species requiring special conservation measures on Annex I of the European Union Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds, 1979.

5.2 Mechanisms targeting the species

These current actions are ongoing. They need to be supported and continued in addition to the new action listed under Section 7.

5.2.1 Survey

The British Trust for Ornithology undertakes regular national surveys of breeding peregrines. Surveys were undertaken in 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2002. Within London, known breeding sites are monitored by members of the Peregrine Working Group.

5.2.2 Nest box protection

Nest boxes have been provided on buildings frequented by peregrines in several places in the UK. In London, to date, boxes have been erected at Crossness sewage treatment works and on a tower block in Islington.

5.2.3 Research

The Hawk and Owl Trust has been undertaking research over the last three years, into the variety of factors that have led to the increase in peregrines nesting on man made structures and in urban environments. A report of this research is to be produced in the spring of 2004, along with an "Advice Note" booklet for interested parties regarding the installation of artificial nest sites and boxes.

6. Objectives, Actions and Targets

Most of these actions are specific to this species. However, there are other, broader actions that apply generically to a number of habitats and species. These are located in a separate ['Generic Action'](#) section which should be read in conjunction with this document. There are generic actions for Site Management, Habitat Protection, Species Protection, Ecological Monitoring, Biological Records, Communications and Funding.

Please note that the partners identified in the tables are those that have been involved in the process of forming the plan. It is not an exclusive list and new partners are both welcomed and needed. The leads identified are responsible for co-ordinating the actions · but are not necessarily implementers.

A Peregrine Working Group has been established to oversee the implementation of this plan. The Working Group comprises interested individuals, plus representatives of the following organisations: English Nature, Hawk and Owl Trust, RSPB, LNHS, GLA, Royal Parks Agency and Corporation of London.

Objective 1 Create new nesting opportunities for peregrines in London

Target: 5 nest boxes in suitable locations by 2004

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
1.1 Contact owners of all buildings where peregrines are behaving territorially	Annually	EN	Peregrine Working Group
1.2 Contact owners/managers of buildings where peregrines display or nest of their own accord within 1 month of discovery	Annually	EN	Peregrine Working Group
1.3 Monitor breeding success at all nest sites (and, where feasible, ring young birds under the necessary Schedule 1 Licence)	Annually	EN	Peregrine Working Group
1.4 Provide 'Advice Note' on locating and installing nest boxes	2004	EN	Peregrine Working Group

Objective 2 Raise awareness of peregrines nesting in the city

Target: Have opportunities for the public to view peregrines once a pair is firmly established

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
2.1 Establish a web-cam to view nest boxes	Once pair established	RSPB	Peregrine Working Group
2.2 Establish a view point where people can watch peregrines at a nest	Once pair established	RSPB	Peregrine Working Group

Relevant Action Plans

London Plans

Tidal Thames; Grazing marsh and Floodplain Grassland Audit.

National Plans

Urban Habitat Statement.

Key References

Fitter, RSR (1949). *London's Birds*, Collins.

Ratcliffe, DA (1980). *The Peregrine Falcon*, Poyser.

Abbreviations

BTO - British Trust for Ornithology
EN - English Nature
GLA - Greater London Authority
H&OT - Hawk & Owl Trust
LA - Local Authorities

LWT - London Wildlife Trust
LNHS - London Natural History Society
RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
WWT - Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

Contact

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