

## PEREGRINE FALCONS IN DOWNTOWN TOLEDO

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A tightly compacted flock of pigeons whirled by my office window in a frenzied state. It can only mean one thing: the Peregrine falcon's come to town for another visit.

Peregrine falcons have become part of America's urban landscape in recent years. Chicago, Grand Rapids, Baltimore, Atlanta, and other cities have released Peregrines in downtown areas hoping to establish them as breeders. The occurrence of Peregrine falcons in downtown Toledo is particularly gratifying as these birds introduced themselves to the city. Since November 1986 at least one Peregrine falcon has graced the downtown Toledo area with varying amounts of frequency.

As far as I know, the first sighting of these Peregrines was on 18 November 1986. On that date, I happened to peer out of my 14th floor office window in Edison Plaza just as an immature-plumaged Peregrine streaked by through the worst of a sleet storm.

Over the course of the next several months, this Peregrine was seen regularly [including on the Christmas Count date for a first-ever Toledo Christmas Count record]. Its most regular perches seemed to be the Ohio Citizens Bank Building, the Toledo Trust Building, and the old Macy's store. A maintenance worker at Toledo Trust discovered where the falcon roosted at night and also informed me and others of the birds habit of resting on or near the fire escape where it would sun itself during the day. The best Peregrine photographs were obtained here, at very close range.

During this time, the Peregrine entertained birders and non-birders alike with its artistry in flight. On one occasion, my fiancée observed the falcon catching insects in its talons high above the city and feeding in mid-flight. A co-worker of mine was lucky enough to witness the falcon pluck a pigeon from mid-air right in front of his office window. The typical scene, however, was of flocks of pigeons exploding from the rooftops as the Peregrine came swooping in. Although I have yet to see a Peregrine make a kill, I did observe several times as the Peregrine brought an already-dead pigeon or Bonaparte's gull to one of its favorite perches.

On 26 March, I happened to be out of the office but received a call from a co-worker who had developed an interest in the Peregrine. He reported that the bird he had been watching for the past several months was being chased by another bird that looked very similar. I have to admit that, at the time, I brushed this second bird off as a Red-tailed hawk which had also become a downtown regular. However, my doubts were quickly proved without merit the next day. Early in the morning I watched as a Peregrine raced by my window. This event had become a regular occurrence; however, this quick glimpse seemed to indicate a blue Peregrine, not the brown immature-plumaged bird. Sure enough, the next day I arrived to the exhilarating scene of two Peregrines circling the top of the Ohio Citizens Bank Building. Wow!

A second Peregrine falcon in downtown Toledo. The adult-plumaged slate-blue male was noticeably smaller than the female. A beautiful specimen indeed!

From the start, the male Peregrine gave every indication that it was quite enamored of the female. His activities included chasing her, diving at her, and chattering constantly.

I monitored the activity of the falcons closely from my office window whenever my work brought me downtown. My obvious hope was that the Peregrines were going to breed. In mid-April I observed as the male fluttered over the female and came within inches of lighting on top of her. From 27 March to 14 May all of my falcon sightings were of both birds together. However, beyond the activities described, I saw no direct evidence of breeding activity. To this day I am still not sure if the immature-plumaged female was of breeding age.

As of the date this article is being written [late August] I have not seen the female Peregrine since 14 May. However, the male has continued to make appearances throughout the summer, although very irregularly in mid-summer. [As I write this paragraph he is once again perched on the Ohio Citizens Building and has not moved all day].

The occurrence of these Peregrine falcons has raised numerous questions in my and other birders' minds: Did the female head north in mid-May? Where is the male spending its time when it is not downtown? Was the female too young to breed? Will the female return again this fall? Where did the Peregrines come from to begin with? Neither bird appeared to be banded.

The answers to at least some of these questions will probably eventually be answered. Practically all Toledo area birders are hopeful that these two Peregrines may eventually provide Ohio's first breeding record. At the very least, these two falcons have livened up birding in downtown Toledo!