

SEATTLE-TACOMA PEREGRINE PROJECT: 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

Urban Raptor Conservancy | <https://urbanraptorconservancy.org/>

It was a tough year for young urban Peregrines. Our flagship nest site, 1201 Third Avenue, produced four eggs. Three hatched, one nestling died on the ledge, and we banded the remaining two chicks. Both fledged, but one soon hit a window and died. We are grateful for Wright Runstad & Company's 26 years of support of this site.

West Seattle Bridge produced three young. Two fledged too early and were rescued and rehabbed at PAWS. We banded and released them, but within a week, observers saw only the third (unbanded) fledgling.

The I-90 East Channel Bridge pair lurked around the bridge but never showed evidence of nesting. We hope they will decide to use the nestbox we installed in 2017 with help from Sound Transit and Kiewit Corporation.

The University Bridge nest had a harrowing season. In the spring, the resident male (banded 17-AD) attracted a new female. Although they visited our preferred site, a nestbox at the I-5 Ship Canal Bridge, they nested at University Bridge, where weak-flying fledglings have nowhere to go but into the water. All four young did fledge into the water, and one drowned. Astonishingly, the other three were rescued through enormous efforts by the Northlake shore community and some miracles. Randy Sigle and Patti Loesche rescued the first fledgling, Spike Mafford the second, and when she was lost again the next day, Jake Fritz found the half-drowned bird hauled out on the dock. The third fledgling was fished out by Matt of Seattle Fisheries Supply. All three survivors went to PAWS, then banded and released. They were still seen in early September. These fledglings would have died without intense human vigilance.

Urban peregrines have "chosen" to move into cities, but cities come with novel hazards: reflective glass, wires, traffic. Not long ago, we almost poisoned them to extinction (DDT). The least we can do is to guide them to less hostile urban nesting prospects. We are fortunate to have had over 20 years of collaboration with SDOT and WSDOT to install nestboxes and band eyasses at Seattle bridge nest sites.

Tacoma Peregrines also fared poorly. The usual downtown nestbox went unoccupied. The Nalley Valley elevated roadway nest fledged two young, but one could not fly, was rescued, banded, and released; a week later he was killed by a car. (The father here since 2016, A-79, was banded in 2015 at the West Seattle nest.) The Route 509 elevated roadway nest fledged three; in early July, one was found badly injured and died.

We confirmed a suspicion of Peregrines nesting at the Boeing Renton 737 plant, when three of four fledglings failed to fly. They were rescued but couldn't be returned to this high-risk site. PAWS worked very hard to place them with a rehabilitator to train them for eventual release. We hope to exclude nesting there in 2020.

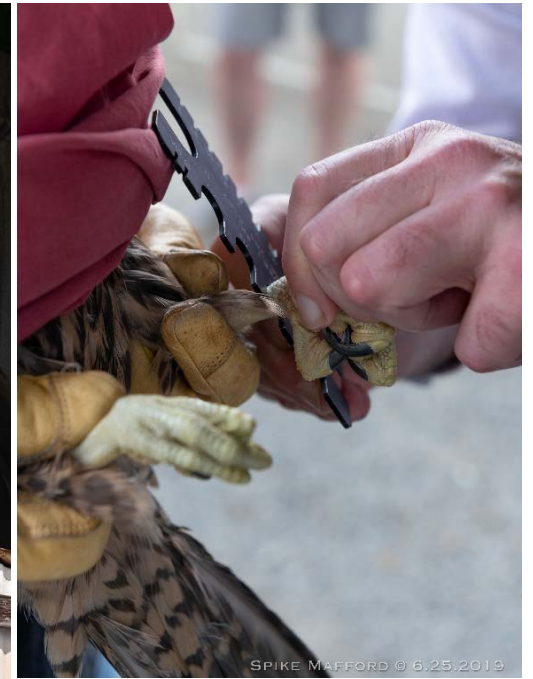
At the end of the nesting season, Ed Deal received a report of a Peregrine at the new, 20-story Hotel Interurban at Southcenter. He found an unbanded adult female perched on the hotel name letters and a collection of pigeon wings and mute streaks (indicating that she was a regular guest), but no evidence of nesting. We hope to interest the hotel management in a nestbox and webcam.

Since 2015, we have observed that wing chords (length of outer primaries) of rescued Peregrine fledglings are consistently well below normal. This helps explain the frequent failure of young falcons to fledge safely: their flight feathers are too short! At a natural cliff nest, updrafts help weak fliers, and lower ledges offer fledglings safer landing. Urban falcons are often reared in crowded nests, where they either fall out or "flunk flight school." Fledging usually takes a straight path to ground or water. Peregrines are excellent swimmers, but without beaches to swim toward, they drown.

From 1994 to 2018, 27% of fledglings at Seattle nests were known dead within 6 months. Already this year, six (38%) of the 16 fledglings from Seattle and Tacoma died or are presumed dead, and three others fared poorly. Without the stewardship of people like you, losses would have been even higher. Thank you for your sightings, interest, and support of our local Peregrines. We hope for a better report in 2020.

For more information about urban Peregrines:

Pagel, JE, Anderson, CM, Bell, DA, Deal, E, Kiff, L, McMorris, FA, Redig, PT, & Sallinger, R. 2018. Peregrine falcon: the neighbors upstairs. In Urban Raptors: Ecology and Conservation of Birds of Prey in Cities. Eds. CW Boal & CR Dykstra. Island Press.



Top, L-R: West Seattle Bridge fledgling flunked flight school (Sharma Dudhee); Patti Loesche releasing male 40-AD at West Seattle Bridge (Jeremiah Holt).
Bottom, L-R: Randy Sigle just after rescuing a fledgling male at University Bridge, later banded as 34-AD (Patti Loesche); just-banded fledgling A-78 at University Bridge (Spike Mafford); measuring leg size for banding at University Bridge (Spike Mafford)