



# Peregrine Falcon Factfile

**ST. ALBANS  
CATHEDRAL**



**Herts &  
Middlesex**  
Wildlife Trust

We're delighted that a pair of peregrine falcons have made their home on St Albans Cathedral for the first time ever. We've put together this helpful guide to peregrines so that you can learn more about these fascinating falcons.

### Description

Peregrines have broad, pointed wings and a relatively short tail. The birds are blue-grey above, with a blackish top of the head and an obvious black 'moustache' that contrasts with its white face. Males are smaller with dashes on the wings and a clean, white breast. Females are much larger, heavily barred on the wings with flecking on the white breast.

### What's in a name?

The name peregrine falcon comes from the Latin word 'peregrinus', which means 'wanderer' or 'pilgrim'. It is so named because outside of the breeding season these birds travel widely.



### Breeding

Peregrine falcons nest in high, out-of-the-way spots such as cliffs (or cathedrals!). The birds mate for life and will return to their nest sites year-on-year. Peregrines normally lay 3-5 eggs each year and each egg takes about one month to hatch.

### Fast falcon

When in full stoop (diving after prey) a peregrine can reach speeds of over 200mph making it the fastest recorded animal on earth. Special adaptations in this bird's nostrils enable it reduce the change in air pressure experienced at this speed so that it can breathe.

### Status

Peregrine numbers reached a low point in the 1960s due to human persecution and the impact of pesticides in the food chain. Improved legislation and protection has helped the birds to recover and their numbers are increasing. However, they are still persecuted - birds are illegally killed to prevent predation on game birds and racing pigeons. Eggs and chicks are also stolen for collections and falconry.



## FALCON FACTFILE

Name:	Peregrine Falcon
Latin Name:	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Length:	39-50cm
Wingspan:	95-115cm
Weight:	600-1,300g
Speed:	When diving for its prey, a peregrine can reach speeds of over 200mph making it the fastest recorded animal on earth!
Status:	Green – numbers of peregrines are increasing across the country
Protection:	Peregrines are a schedule 1 species, protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and disturbing them is a criminal offence.





## Peregrine Falcon FAQs

### How many breeding pairs are there now in the UK?

The number of breeding pairs of peregrines across the UK, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands is approximately 1700 pairs (2014).

### Are there more peregrines in Hertfordshire?

There are thought to be five breeding pairs of peregrines in Hertfordshire – in St Albans, Watford, Hemel Hempstead, Welwyn Garden City and Wymondley.

### Are peregrine's migratory species or can I see them here all year?

Peregrines across the world do seem to migrate to reach different climates, however in the UK they seem to stick around.

### What do peregrines eat?

The most common prey item is pigeons however, they do prey on a wide variety of other bird species too, from smaller birds such as finches and wrens to larger birds such as ducks and magpies.

### When will the chicks fledge?

A young bird that has just left the nest has fledged. When it is still in the area and flying it is known as a fledgling. The young fledge between 35-42 days after hatching.

### How do the chicks learn to catch their own prey?

Adult peregrines will withhold food items and encourage the fledglings to take longer flights. At this time, the adults will drop prey in mid-air for them to catch in a food pass. Leaving their parents is gradual and spread over several weeks, during which time they gradually learn to fend for themselves. The adults will continue to feed them until they disperse naturally. There is no evidence that the adults drive juveniles away – it is likely that they will detach themselves from the parents as instinct dictates.

### Where can I find more information about birds of prey?

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust's website has lots of information about birds of prey and other local wildlife – [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk)

## PEREGRINE FALCONS – HELPING MAKE ST ALBANS WILDER!

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust believe that wildlife should have space to thrive alongside our everyday lives and that everyone benefits from having access to nature. The Trust's Wilder St Albans project, delivered in conjunction with St Albans City & District Council, aim to increase the habitats across St Albans and the wildlife they support by coordinating a programme of practical action by the community. The peregrines at St Albans cathedral are a demonstration that wildlife can find a home in our most iconic urban environments.

