



© Patrick Wainwright

Peregrine Falcon Factfile

**ST. ALBANS
CATHEDRAL**



**Herts &
Middlesex**
Wildlife Trust



In 2022, a pair of Peregrine Falcons bred on St Albans Cathedral for the first time ever. We are delighted that the birds have been seen on and around the Cathedral since early spring and for the second year in a row are breeding. We've put together this helpful guide so that you can learn more about these fascinating falcons.

Description

Peregrine Falcons 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 to 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 pairs of Peregrines in Hertfordshire – in St Albans, Watford, Hemel Hempstead, Welwyn Garden City and Wymondley.

Are Peregrines 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.

How do Peregrines tend to their eggs?

Peregrines usually lay a clutch of 3 - 4 eggs (only two were laid last year on the Cathedral as they were a new and inexperienced pair). After the first egg is laid, the others will be laid at intervals of around two days per egg. It is only once the third egg is laid that the female will fully incubate them although the Peregrines will stay close to the nest site and protect the eggs from predators in the meantime. The male will also take his turn to sit on the eggs, whilst the female hunts for prey. The eggs will hatch around one month after they are laid.

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

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, aims 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.



The history of Peregrine Falcons at St Albans Cathedral

The first confirmed evidence of a Peregrine Falcon was an item of prey that was found on the Tower in 2018, albeit there were rumours of sightings of single birds prior. This prompted local ornithologist and licensed bird ringer, Barry Trevis to make his first contact with the Cathedral. Following that sightings reduced. Then, Alan Gardiner, Herts County Bird Recorder for Herts Natural History Society (Herts Bird Club), reported one was being seen regularly in late winter 2020. Barry then made his first visit to examine the top of the Main Tower on 18 February 2020. Due to the pandemic, Barry's contact with the Cathedral was put on hold until October 2021. Just a few months later, in mid-March 2022, there were first sightings of an actual Peregrine pair and the nest tray was fitted on 23 March 2022.

Watch the Peregrine Falcons live on the Cathedral's webcam!

You can watch all the action live from the Peregrine Falcon's nesting tray on the Cathedral via the newly installed webcam, which has been generously sponsored by Leica, at www.stalbanscathedral.org/peregrine-live-cam



Peregrine Watch events

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and the RSPB are organising Peregrine Watch within the grounds of the Cathedral over weekends throughout spring and summer. Come and find out more about these magnificent birds and get a close up view through telescopes and binoculars, which will be provided. A schedule of these events will be published online at:

<https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events/peregrine-watch-2023>

