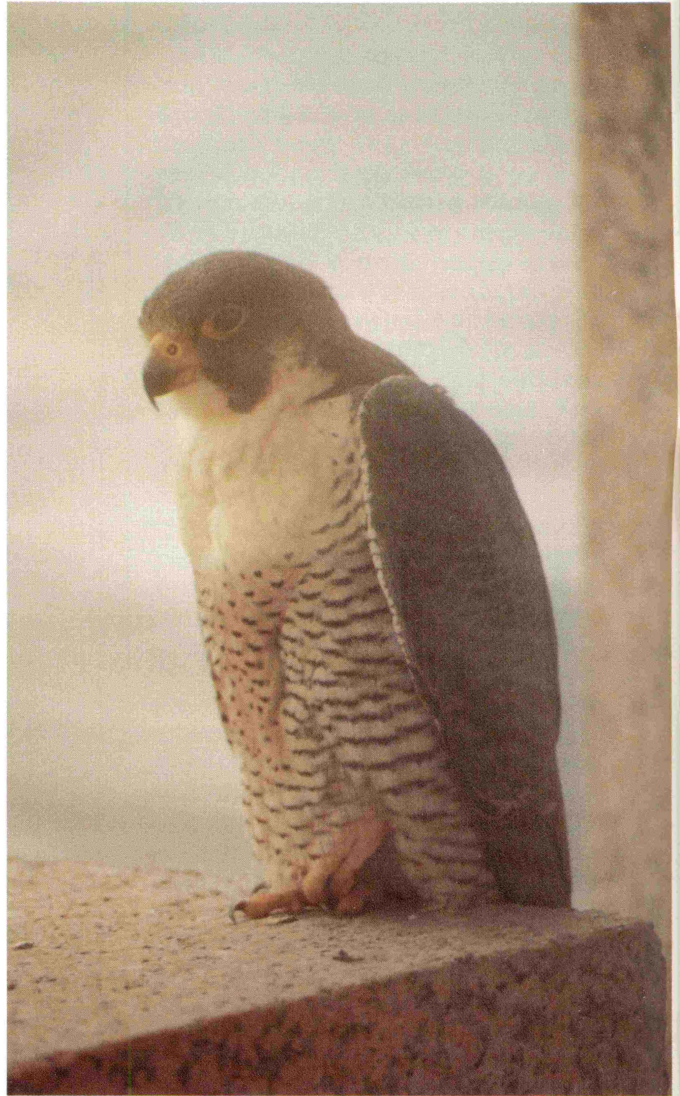
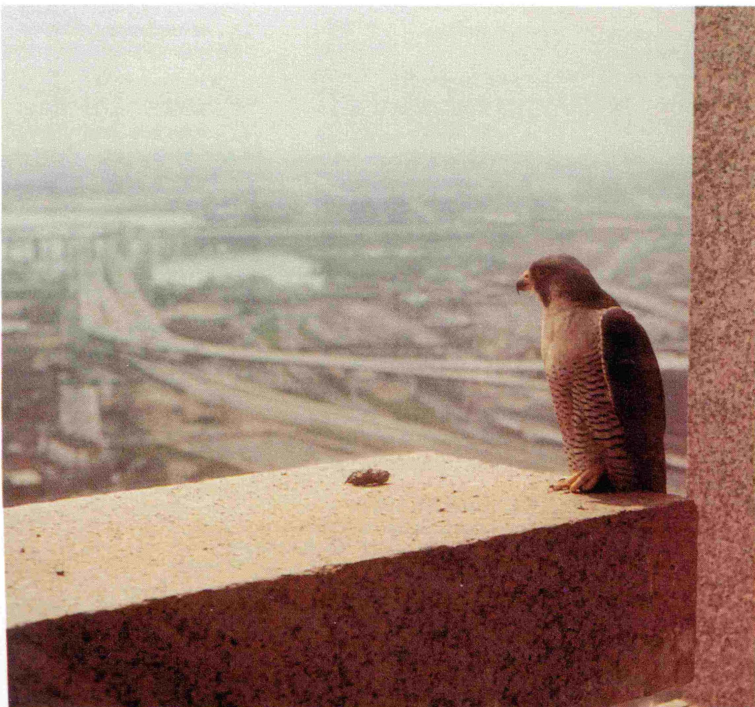




*The United States Fidelity and Guaranty Building,  
Baltimore, Maryland.*



*Scarlett*



*Scarlett overlooking the Inner Harbor area.*



*Baby peregrines.*

# Baltimore's Birds: A Peregrine Falcon Story

by  
Ro Dahle  
Maryland State Coordinator

In recent years the city of Baltimore, Maryland has been involved in a process of rebirth; it has succeeded in revitalizing its downtown business district as well as homesteading many of its older communities.

It was more than appropriate, then, that on Friday, April 6, 1984 the first city-bred peregrine falcons in thirty years were hatched on a ledge outside the 33rd floor of the United States Fidelity and Guaranty Building, one of the Inner Harbor area's newest skyscrapers.

The hatching signifies yet another success in attempts by the Peregrine Fund, Inc., headed by Dr. Tom Cade, professor of ornithology at Cornell University, New York to save the peregrine falcon.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s the peregrine falcon population decreased sharply. So sharply, that by the early 1960s there were no peregrine falcons left east of the Mississippi. In fact, the Eastern North American subspecies of the peregrine falcon is now considered extinct.

Later research by Dr. Joseph Hickey of the University of Wisconsin concluded that DDT was the culprit. The toxins were having devastating effects on the calcium levels of falcon eggshells, rendering them too thin to withstand incubation. DDT was also affecting estrogen levels in adult birds, altering courtship and parenting behaviors. Sadly, Derek Radcliffe was finding similar data in Great Britain. You see, the peregrine was also dying in Western Europe and Britain.

An international conference called by Dr. Hickey in 1969 pooled information and drew world-wide attention to the peregrine falcon's plight. Post-conference research is largely credited with the near total restriction placed on the use of DDT by the Federal govern-

ment in 1972.

In the early 1970s The Peregrine Fund began its program of captive breeding and reintroduction of the species into the wild. The peregrine falcon species is actually comprised of a number of subspecies of the bird; among them the Chilean peregrine, Tundra peregrine, etc. The various subspecies possess subtle variations in color. It was from a wild caught population that The Peregrine Fund embarked on its fight to save this bird. The organization has since succeeded in producing about 250 peregrines per year at its breeding facilities in Fort Collins, Colorado and Santa Cruz, California. The birds are then banded and reintroduced into the environment.

In the fall of 1977 a female falcon bred by The Peregrine Fund was released from Carroll Island, near East Baltimore. She was a cross between a Chilean and a Tundra peregrine — the cross being an attempt to dampen her migratory urge and hence decreasing her risk to DDT found in higher concentrations in southern climes. That spring she reappeared on a ledge at the USF&G Building in downtown Baltimore.

And so begins Scarlett's story. Promptly "adopted" by the employees of USF&G and the general citizenry of Baltimore, Scarlett has become another source of the city's growing pride.

First attempts to mate her, however, proved unsuccessful, even tragic. Alas, poor Scarlett, the falcon, seemed to have the same run of bad luck with husbands as her novelistic counterpart. Two males brought in showed no promise at all. Rhett was thought to have some potential but was found dead in a grain elevator having eaten a poisoned pigeon. But it was Ashley who met the meanest fate of all. After surviving being shot by an unknown gun-

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ner, he later collided with a truck on the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

It was during these times when Scarlett lacked a mate that her abilities as a foster mother were put to use by The Peregrine Fund. Baby peregrines, known as eyases, which had been captively bred were brought to her nesting place which is called a scrape. Scarlett's scrape is a 3' x 3' square shallow structure filled with gravel; its purpose being to keep any eggs from rolling off the ledge.

Scarlett took good care of her adopted chicks, but she did need some help. John Barber, a data processing supervisor for USF&G is also a trained zoologist and is Scarlett's official caretaker. Since Scarlett had no mate to bring food to her and the eyases, John provided her with chickens and captively raised quail on a daily basis.

Besides providing food during times when there were adopted chicks, John also has kept records of Scarlett's comings and goings, when eggs were laid, retrieved eggshells for research by The Fund, etc. He is well suited to the task having previously been with the Smithsonian Institute, Division of Birds, National Museum of Natural History for several years.

In May of 1983, however, Scarlett's luck changed. An unbanded male peregrine falcon appeared at USF&G and from just where has been a great source of debate. Some feel that this male falcon, known as a tiercel since the female is usually one third larger than her mate, may be the offspring of a pair previously released by The Fund. John Barber feels that he is a wild Tundra falcon since he possesses the white chest and black back of that subspecies. An unbanded tiercel was sited in Norfolk, Virginia earlier in the year and John feels this may be the same bird. Since the bird is unbanded, "Beauregard's" past will always add some mystery to the story.

Scarlett and Beauregard remained together and hopes were high. During the months that followed, John Barber observed the courtship feeding and bowing. Most exciting though, were the courtship flights where the birds would soar upwards to 2,000 feet, lock talons, and then dive together in a barrel roll.

John feels that the prolonged time that Scarlett and Beauregard had for courtship may have been a strong factor in their breeding success which produced a total of four eggs on February 26, 28 and March 2 & 4. On April 6, two eggs hatched followed by the other two on April 7 and 8. The eyases were fuzzy

white and weighed a few ounces each.

I was able to see them on April 20 in their scrape on a ledge outside the 33rd floor of the USF&G Building. They are beautiful and Scarlett, who perches slightly above them, is magnificent. She maintains a simultaneous watch over them and the busy harbor below. I was assured that Beauregard was probably on another ledge of the building, a floor or two above or below. He provides Scarlett and the babies with food every day — pigeons and starlings he has caught.

Scarlett will continue to feed the eyases for another six to eight weeks. She will then coax them to dive for their own food by dropping a catch within their sight by the scrape. Later this summer she will drive them from their hatch site and they will be on their own. They will be banded beforehand.

Hopefully this will be only the first of many peregrine hatchings on this ledge. John Barber tells me the birds mate for life and maintain a very high site fidelity toward their nesting place.

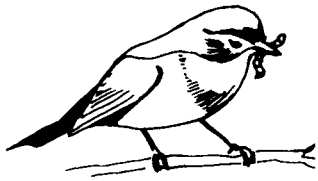
Scarlett and Beauregard's story is a hopeful one. In these days of killing pesticides and habitat destruction, man has succeeded in reversing his actions. He has given one of nature's most magnificent creatures a second chance of life. And for himself and his children not all is gone with the wind.

*Editor's Note: Thursday, September 6, 1984 Scarlett died in the veterinary hospital at the Baltimore Zoo. An office worker in the Standard Oil Building noticed Scarlett perched on an abandoned building and obviously sick. John Barber, an employee of the United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company and former Smithsonian Institution ornithologist was notified and he took Scarlett to the Zoo hospital where veterinarians worked on her for four hours to no avail. Preliminary results of the autopsy showed that Scarlett died of an infection resulting from a puncture wound in the back of her mouth, possibly caused by choking on a bone.*

*Although Scarlett's death was an unexpected tragedy, nature has a way of perpetuating life. Within four days of Scarlett's demise, another female peregrine was spotted flying by the U.S.F. & G. building and landing on various ledges. There is an excellent possibility that Beauregard and the new female, named Blythe by the U.S.F. & G. employees, will pair bond and carry on the tradition begun in Baltimore by Scarlett. ●*

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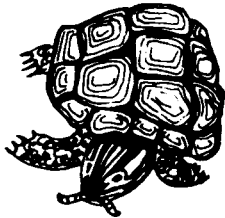
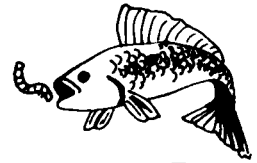
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