

## FALCONWATCH 2024



### Summary Report

For the Executives and Members of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club

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## INTRODUCTION

The breeding population of Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) had disappeared from Ontario by the mid-1960s. Bioaccumulation of the pesticide DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) caused widespread reproductive failure leading to a Canada-wide DDT ban by 1969.

In addition to the ban, a national reintroduction program was begun. Hacking of Peregrine Falcons involves obtaining chicks bred in captivity when they are a few weeks old and raising them with minimal human contact until they are ready to fledge and be released into suitable habitat. Between 1977 and 2006, approximately 600 Peregrine Falcons were released in Ontario through projects managed by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) and various naturalist organizations and corporations. In the Ontario Peregrine Falcon Recovery Strategy, section 1.3, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/peregrine-falcon-recovery-strategy>, a province wide Peregrine Falcon survey conducted in 2010 confirmed 119 nesting territories in Ontario. On 30 November 2011 the Peregrine Falcon status on the Species at Risk in Ontario list was changed from “Endangered” to “Special Concern”, meaning they are no longer endangered or threatened but may become endangered or threatened due to a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats. (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/peregrine-falcon>).

Although DDT use was banned in Canada and the United States in the 1970s, "We should be alert to the possibility of other chemical risks emerging ..... such as flame retardants, and we would do well to heed the lesson that the 1960s threat to the Peregrine was discovered largely by accident" (Patrick Stirling-Aird, *Peregrine Falcon*, 2012, Firefly Books). As of April 2017, DDT is still being made in North Korea, India, and China and used in various “third world” countries. In addition to environmental contamination, the Peregrine continues to face risks [<https://www.ontario.ca/page/peregrinefalcon-evaluation>] due to human disturbance, habitat change or loss and erratic weather effects.

Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, the book which was most responsible for bringing the dangers of DDT to light, wrote, “Conservation is a cause that has no end. There is no point at which we say “Our work is finished.” The Hamilton Falconwatch community has played, and will continue to play, an important and vital role in helping the Peregrine Falcon. From 1995 to 2024, 74 chicks have fledged from the Sheraton Hamilton nest. In that time Falconwatch volunteers carried out a total of 30 successful rescues of downed chicks. For the complete history of the adults and chicks from the Hamilton nesting site, visit [<http://falcons.hamiltonnature.org>] and click on the “History” Button/tab at top right.

## AN OVERVIEW OF FALCONWATCH 2024

Falconwatch 2024 represents the 30th consecutive year that Peregrine Falcons have nested on the same ledge of the Sheraton Hotel in Hamilton. The breeding pair, Judson and McKeever, produced their first egg on March 17th, with three more following on the 19th, 22nd and 24th. The first egg hatched on April 26th, the second and third on the 27th. The fourth egg did not hatch. The chicks became more active, and began to jump up on the nest ledge starting on 21st of May. On the 25th of May, the three chicks were brought out of the nest by trained climbers, and banded for identification. The silver band given to each Falcon has a unique identification number given by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, and

the coloured band is given so that the individual can be identified from a distance. Each chick was named after being banded: Blakeley, Westdale and Stinson. The egg which did not hatch was taken in during the banding and sent out to be assessed for contaminants.

Judson (the adult male) was often not on camera during the beginning of the watch, as he was out hunting, while McKeever (the adult female) would stay at the nest and pass food to the chicks when it was brought. On May 31st one of the chicks, Westdale, was believed to have died in the nest for unknown reasons. It is thought that she could have had an obstruction as she was seen beforehand in a game of tug of war during a feeding with McKeever where she ended up being dragged the length of the nest ledge, but the cause of her death is unclear. This left us with two healthy chicks to monitor for the rest of the watch.

The two remaining chicks, Stinson and Blakeley, were a textbook example of the growth and development of a Peregrine Falcon. Blakeley flew first on June 8th at night, Stinson followed on June 9th in the morning. There were no rescues needed and they continued to hit each developmental milestone without issue.

## **OBJECTIVES**

### **The objectives of the Falconwatch are to:**

- Observe and track the daily habits of the chicks while they are young, ensuring their safety and preparing for a rescue if one is needed.
- Monitor the growth and development of the peregrine falcon chicks, taking field notes to track important milestones such as helicoptering, first flights, learning how to hunt and so on.
- Inform and educate the public on the goals and importance of the falcon watch, the statistics and history of the peregrine falcons in the area, as well as how to get involved and help the falcon watch organization.
- Provide updates on the peregrine falcon adults and chicks by completing final reports at the end of the day as well as sending updates to social media for the public and volunteers to watch.

### **The objectives of the Falconwatch final report are to:**

- Summarize the events of the 2024 falcon watch as well as provide an understanding of the overall duties and responsibilities of the falcon watch every year. A copy is sent to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (NDMNR).
- Provide a permanent record of the highlights of the 2024 falcon watch, including information about the banding of the chicks as well as their growth and development.

## METHODOLOGY

### Preparations for Falconwatch 2024

#### *i. Rescue Team Training*

A team of experienced volunteers was once again in place to help in the event of a Peregrine Falcon chick rescue. The members of the rescue team were on call to perform rescues during hours (6AM to 9AM) when a Coordinator was not on site. They also covered lunch and dinner breaks. Those who were available also acted as back-up for the Coordinators during the hours when they were on site (9AM to 9PM). On May 22, 2024 the Coordinators, Lead Monitors and rescue team members took part in a training session at the Mountsberg Conservation Area's Douglas G. Cockburn Centre for Birds of Prey. The training was conducted by Sandra Davey, Coordinator, Animal Care and Programs (Conservation Halton) and former Falconwatch Coordinator. During the session the team was shown how to safely and effectively capture and restrain a grounded Peregrine. Portions of the OMNDMNRFP protocol for dealing with a downed Peregrine were also reviewed.

#### *ii. Contact with other Organizations*

Prior to the start of the watch season, Lead Monitors Pat Baker and Leah Schwenger contacted the property and/or security managers of the following: Hamilton Sheraton Hotel, McMaster David Braley Health Sciences Centre, 100 King Street West (Stelco Tower, Real Properties), Ellen Fairclough Building, Standard Life Building, Core Entertainment (FirstOntario Centre, FirstOntario Concert Hall), Art Gallery of Hamilton, Bank of Montreal (BMO). They were given contact numbers for Lead Monitors and the Coordinators and watch information. The phone numbers for the person to contact in each building is on the pocket card the Lead Monitors, Coordinators and rescue team carry, and in the volunteer manual binder. Security at Stelco Tower had a list with names of those permitted to access the 20<sup>th</sup> floor.

#### *iii. Volunteer recruitment*

Volunteers who participated in previous Falconwatch seasons were contacted by a Lead Monitor and asked to participate in this year's watch. Calls for volunteers went out on the Hamilton Falconwatch website, Facebook and Instagram pages. This season, many dedicated long-term volunteers and new volunteers joined the watch team and were an asset to the season's watch.

#### *iv. Volunteer orientation*

The volunteer orientation was held on May 23, 2024 at the Braley Health Sciences Centre. There were 63 attendees at the orientation, including the Falconwatch members who gave the presentation. The purpose of the session was to inform volunteers of their duties and to review procedures and use of equipment. Christa Jackson presented on the history of Hamilton Falconwatch and Lead Monitor Pat Baker went over the safety and rescue protocols. Instructions on taking notes to be kept in the field notes binder were explained and this year's Coordinators **Cloe Wagstaffe** and **Matthew Mills** were introduced. Mary Anne McDougall explained the sign-up procedures for Time to Sign Up ([timetosignup.com/falconwatch2024/](https://timetosignup.com/falconwatch2024/)). Emails sent by volunteers are handled by Lead Monitor Leah Schwenger, and any volunteer experiencing difficulties with Time to Sign Up was redirected to Mary Anne McDougall. Parking options were explained before a period where the volunteers were given a chance to get answers to their questions.

## ***v. Scheduling***

The Coordinators were on watch from **May 28 to June 18, 2024**. The volunteer Falconwatch was conducted from May 28 to June 18, 2024. Volunteers were present to monitor the birds' activities from 6AM to 9PM (in two-hour shifts from 9AM on). The Coordinators were present daily from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monitoring of the fledglings concluded on June 18. Volunteers were able to sign up for as many or as few shifts as they liked. The Coordinators had access to volunteer schedules each day through Time to Sign Up. At times throughout the season, there were gaps in the volunteer schedule which were sometimes filled in response to a request for volunteers posted to the Hamilton Falconwatch Facebook and Instagram page as well as the Falconwatch website. Volunteers often offered to stay past their scheduled shifts to help fill gaps. Volunteers were urged to contact one of the Coordinators or the Lead Monitors if they were unable to make a shift on short notice.

## **Watch Stations**

### ***i. McMaster University David Braley Health Sciences Centre ("Home Base")***

The David Braley building was considered home base during Falconwatch. Our main resources for the watch such as rescue boxes, radios, the field notes and more are kept in a main floor storage room. The back parking lot was where people were stationed, and has a fantastic view of most of the areas the Falcon adults and chicks go. The Stelco tower, the Sheraton building and nest, BDC building, Homewood Suites and many smaller buildings could be seen from this area.

### ***ii. King Street near Summers Lane***

This location was used often and is very close to the Sheraton. If one of the chicks were to fall out of the nest, we would be able to see where exactly it landed as well as be able to get to the chick quickly and easily. It was an extremely important place to have a rescue trained person positioned when the chicks were active.

### ***iii. Stelco Tower (20th floor)***

Stelco Tower was used as a lookout point, mainly after the chicks had fledged. From the 20th floor, you can see most of the roofs and spots that are otherwise not visible by camera or by volunteers on the ground. This was valuable to use if a chick went missing or went out of sight during a flight.

### ***iv. Hamilton City Hall***

The Hamilton City Hall was a great location to view most of the buildings nearby, and provided a slightly more south perspective, which allowed volunteers to view different angles of the buildings than the other locations. This was a great resource to use to monitor BDC where adults and chicks were frequently seen.

### ***v. Art Gallery of Hamilton, upper level***

The Art Gallery outer platform was a second location to view the Sheraton nest as well as both the BDC building and City Hall. It is close enough to King Street for another person to come and help a rescue.

vi. **Jackson Square Plaza**

The Jackson Square Plaza played an important role once the chicks fledged, as it gave us a northern viewpoint of the buildings which couldn't be seen from other locations. This was important to have to monitor falcon locations and locate birds when they went out of sight from other spots.

## **Data Collection**

Data sheets containing daily field notes were kept in a binder and used by the coordinators and volunteers to record daily observations of the Peregrines' activities and times of occurrence. Activities recorded included rescues, feedings, flights by the fledglings, hunting attempts, interactions with other species, and interactions between the Peregrine chicks and adults. Events which indicated the development of the chicks were also noted and any novel behaviour was emphasized. If time did not permit recording behaviours as they were happening an effort was made to record the event afterwards. For example, if two birds were in the air at once and the coordinator and/or volunteer was needed to keep track of the birds, notes could be made once they stopped flying. The volunteer who was at 'home base' at the David Braley building was responsible for recording the notes from calls which came in through the radio. The data recorder was asked to record observations without including any personal bias or opinion. If a particularly significant event happened the coordinator would make a point of asking the data recorder to note the event. The coordinators summarized each day's events in daily reports, which were posted online and can be found on the Hamilton Community Peregrine Project (HCPP) website: <http://falcons.hamiltonnature.org>.

## **Rescue Procedures**

A minimum of four rescue boxes were kept at the David Braley building. The rescue boxes were small cardboard veterinarian type animal carriers which contained cut resistant gloves, a rolled-up towel, and folded towels. If a rescue was required, all needed supplies were easily transported to the rescue site. When we had a volunteer onsite, at least one rescue box was kept at the Health Sciences Centre whilst the others were kept with volunteers stationed throughout downtown. During watch hours, when a volunteer was onsite and if a bird required rescuing, the volunteer was to maintain contact via two-way radio with the coordinator on duty and to follow their instructions. Only members of the rescue team were to perform rescues and do so according to the procedure which was explained during the rescue training. When a bird was in a precarious situation, the volunteer and coordinator would communicate by two-way radio if the bird flew or changed positions. Volunteers, except the Rescue Team members, were not to touch a fallen bird unless necessary to remove it from imminent danger. However, they were to try to shield the bird from danger until the coordinator arrived on the scene to perform a rescue. One or two boxes were kept overnight at Sheraton so that they could be accessed by the volunteer who was on at 5:30AM, they contained the equipment required to start the morning's watch. No rescues were needed in the 2024 season.

## **Equipment**

A bin kept at home base contained the transponders, swipe card, binoculars, volunteer manual, safety vests and both human and bird first aid kits. Two transponders for the David Braley parking lot were

provided for Falconwatch. The swipe card, kept by the coordinator, allowed 24-hour access to the David Braley Centre. There were several extra binoculars available for the volunteers to use, a help for newer volunteers who often did not have binoculars of their own. The volunteer manual contained all of the important information for volunteers, many copies of a map of downtown Hamilton and a parking permit for the BMO parking lot and City Hall. At the end of each day, the equipment required to begin the next morning's watch was put into a single rescue box and stored at the Sheraton Hotel. The rest of the equipment remained in the security room of the David Braley Health Sciences Centre.

A set of two-way radios allowed for instant communications to call out the positions of falcons so that all of the members of the watch could hear, including webmaster Charles Gregory. **Six radios were rented from Jannatec Technologies along with two extra battery packs and eight charging ports in total.** It was critical to keep radios well charged. These were stored at the security room of the David Braley Health Sciences Centre.

## Partners

The success of the Hamilton Community Peregrine Project this year and every year is in large part due to our many local partners. This year the project was supported by:

**Sheraton Hamilton Hotel:** nest ledge, video camera and webcam computer location, banding facilities, rescue box overnight storage

**McMaster University, David Braley Health Sciences Centre:** primary Falconwatch site, facilities for volunteer training, storage for Falconwatch items, access to the building during watch hours, parking

**Real Properties Ltd.:** access to the 20th floor of Stelco building as needed to check roof tops for chicks

**Hanwha Vision:** donation of a new Wisenet HD video camera to replace the old stationary camera #2

**Hamilton Ward 2 Community Grant:** funding for the installation of the new camera and additional equipment obtained through Councillor Cameron Kroetsch

**Worldline:** high speed internet access

**Fibernetics Business Service:** HCCP web server and internet access

**Jannatec Technologies:** two-way radios

**Hamilton Video and Sound:** technical expertise

**The Owl Foundation:** peregrine falcon expertise and care

**Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (OMNDMNR):**

Government authority overseeing all matters relating to Peregrine Falcons

**Hamilton Naturalists' Club (HNC):** project management, volunteers, coordinators, video cameras

**Conservation Halton (Mountsberg Raptor Centre):** Peregrine Falcon expertise, rescue training

**TD Friends of the Environment:** supporter since the beginning

**Canadian Peregrine Foundation:** arrangements for banding juvenile Peregrines

**8 Trees Inc:** banding, expertise

**BMO:** volunteer parking

**City of Hamilton:** parking pass at city hall.



## Media Coverage

### HCCP Video Cameras and Internet Website

The Falconwatch video cameras were once again extremely valuable tools. They are used to monitor the activity of adults and chicks, and give us the capability to read leg bands. With the new video camera donated by Hanwha Vision, paired with our old pan-tilt-zoom camera, we are now able to closely observe two different locations at a distance, which improves our ability to keep track of chicks and adults as they fly from one rooftop to another around the downtown core. This helps us maintain situational awareness, even when all the birds are not within sight of watchers on the ground.

The HCCP website (<http://falcons.hamiltonnature.org>) displays and stores an archive of images uploaded live, year-round. The site is also used to post information about falcons and news updates on their activities, such as laying, hatching, feedings and fledgings. During nesting season, the site sees more than 1200 visitors per day with some of them watching the birds for hours. We've had over 160,000 visits in total since March 2024. On-street Falconwatch volunteers make use of the website images on their phones, to help them keep track of birds in or near the nest but out of sight from street level.

### Social Media

There is a Facebook group which is maintained and run by the HCCP called "Hamilton Falconwatch" (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/hamiltonfalconwatch/>). This year the group grew by over 500 members, reaching more than 3100, mostly from Hamilton and Burlington but with some as far away as Europe and Australia. We post our news updates and selected "favorite" images to the group daily during nesting season, with images and updates being posted less frequently throughout the rest of the year. The typical news report got about 2000 views. Some posts, like hatching and banding, got over 5000 views, which means they received significant attention from outside our group. Members of the group watch our website throughout the day, and some will upload any interesting images that our cameras capture, often before the webmaster has had a chance to review the website archive and select/post recent photos. The group also serves as a resource for our community to ask informal questions and get answers on topics like peregrine biology and behaviour. The group, together with the website, provides a valuable resource for recruiting volunteers and seeking donations.

The Instagram account (Hamiltonfalconwatch) had 504 followers at the end of the watch – a significant increase from last year. The best webcam photos are posted to the site.

### Commercial Media Coverage

*i. The Hamilton Spectator online, Jeremy Kemeny (webmaster), Cathie Coward 17.03.24*  
"A Hamilton springtime beacon: First downtown Sheraton falcon egg arrives on cue."

[https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/a-hamilton-springtime-beacon-first-downtown-sheraton-falcon-egg-arrives-on-cue/article\\_111a6133-ca59-5dc8-b2cf-1057107449c4.html](https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/a-hamilton-springtime-beacon-first-downtown-sheraton-falcon-egg-arrives-on-cue/article_111a6133-ca59-5dc8-b2cf-1057107449c4.html)

**ii. The Hamilton Spectator online, Jeremy Kemeny 30.04.24**

“Falcon chicks get cracking at downtown hotel nest”

[https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/falcon-chicks-hatch-at-downtown-hamilton-nest/article\\_8215161a-a38f-52b2-9435-823389a20015.html](https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/falcon-chicks-hatch-at-downtown-hamilton-nest/article_8215161a-a38f-52b2-9435-823389a20015.html)

**iii. The Hamilton Spectator, Joan Little 9.05.24**

“Is there hope for democracy” In this article the chicks are the closing paragraph.

[https://www.thespec.com/opinion/columnists/is-there-hope-for-democracy/article\\_f0560e6e-aea8-5719-863b-3b44d61e9286.html](https://www.thespec.com/opinion/columnists/is-there-hope-for-democracy/article_f0560e6e-aea8-5719-863b-3b44d61e9286.html)

**iv. The Hamilton Spectator online, Cathie Coward 16.05.24**

“Hamilton peregrine falcon chicks named and banded”, photos and video.

[https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/hamilton-peregrine-falcon-chicks-named-and-banded/article\\_afc15da3-4a5c-56ee-b530-fa8eab00d429.html](https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/hamilton-peregrine-falcon-chicks-named-and-banded/article_afc15da3-4a5c-56ee-b530-fa8eab00d429.html)

**v. The Hamilton Spectator, Cathie Coward 17.05.24**

“A Matriarchal Swoop.”

[https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/hamilton-peregrine-falcon-chicks-named-and-banded/article\\_afc15da3-4a5c-56ee-b530-fa8eab00d429.html](https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/hamilton-peregrine-falcon-chicks-named-and-banded/article_afc15da3-4a5c-56ee-b530-fa8eab00d429.html)

**vi. The Hamilton Spectator Headlines, newsletters@ metroland.com 17.05.24**

“Hamilton peregrine falcon chicks named and branded.”

**vii. The Hamilton Spectator online, Jeremy Kemeny posted 4.06.24**

“One peregrine falcon chick dies — succumbing to one of many hazards of fledging on the downtown Sheraton Hotel ledge nest.”

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/peregrine-falcon-chick-dead-westdale-1.7222733>

**viii. CBC News Hamilton, Justin Chandler 30.04.24**

“Hamilton’s Falconwatch prepares for another fledging as 3 chicks hatch.”

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/falcon-chicks-hatch-2024-1.7189469>

**ix. CBC News Hamilton, Justin Chandler 16.04.24**

“3 peregrine falcons named, banded and ready to learn to fly – coming soon to the sky near you.”

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/peregrine-falcons-branded-hamilton-1.7205408>

**x. CBC News Hamilton, Bobby Hristova 3.06.24**

“1 of Hamilton’s 3 falcon chicks has died, volunteer group says. Westdale, roughly a month old, died late last week.” Further details on the CBC website.

**xi. CHML Global News, Don Mitchell 26.04.24**

“Hamilton’s Falconwatch spots first chick from peregrines living downtown.”

[https://apple.news/AGES\\_7ZF6TO-U6keaC0jzA](https://apple.news/AGES_7ZF6TO-U6keaC0jzA)

**xii. CHML Global News 16.04.24**

In the morning news: banding, naming and mentioned we need volunteers as chicks were blown out of nest last year, Mark talking about the importance of the peregrines. Good coverage.

**xiii. Hamilton Naturalists' Club publication: The Wood Duck 2024**

**March:** "New Falconwatch Camera on the Way" p. 158

**April:** "Falconwatch News" p. 179 Christa Jackson

**May:** "Judson and McKeever Return to the Sheraton" p. 207 Mary Anne McDougall

**September:** "Peregrine Falcons - Chicks to Juveniles" p. 21 Mary Anne McDougall

**xiv. North End Breezes 2024 Mary Anne McDougall**

**March:** "Hamilton's Urban Peregrine Falcons"

**June:** "Peregrine Falcon Chicks Hatch in Hamilton"

## **A BRIEF BIO OF THE 2024 PEREGRINE FALCON CHICKS**

Three chicks were successfully banded on the 15th of May. All three of them were determined to be female due to their size and weight. A fourth unhatched egg was taken from the nest during the banding and determined to be compromised.

Westdale was given a white band, with the ID H/79. Her USFW band number was given as 1947-52736. She weighed in at 755 grams, and was aged 18 days old.

Blakeley was given a red band, with the ID H/78. Her USFW band number was given as 1947-52735. She weighed in at 739 grams, and was aged 19 days old.

Stinson was given a blue band with the ID H/82. Her USFW band number was given as 1947-52737. She weighed in at 776 grams, and was aged 19 days old.

Westdale became ill early on in the watch and was determined to be deceased while in the nest on May 31st. It is unknown what caused her to die. The body was never moved out of the nest by the parents or siblings.

The two **remaining** chicks fledged successfully and did not require rescue at any point during the watch.

## **WATCH HIGHLIGHTS**

Friday, April 26th: the first egg has successfully hatched.

Sunday, April 27th: two more eggs have successfully hatched for a total of three peregrine chicks.

Wednesday, May 15th: the three chicks were successfully banded and given their names, as well as ID numbers. The compromised egg was brought out of the nest at the same time the three chicks were taken out.

Tuesday, May 28th: the first day of falcon watch begins. Volunteers and Coordinators arrive to monitor and track each of the birds and their daily habits and growth.

Friday, May 31st: it became obvious that Westdale had died in the nest. The cause is unclear, and volunteers and coordinators continue to monitor the development of the remaining chicks.

Thursday, June 6th: the chicks begin to practice “helicoptering” - a manoeuver where the chicks flap and hover above the ledge to get used to the sensation of flying. They also have been seen running along the ledge and hopping while flapping. This is a sign that their first flights will happen very soon.

Saturday/Sunday June 8/9th: both chicks had a successful first flight within a few hours of each other. Blakeley flew from the nest ledge to the Hamilton Convention Centre at 11:10pm on the 8th. At 6:30 the next morning, Stinson flew from the nest to the David Braley building.

Wednesday, June 12th: the adult peregrine falcons begin to teach the two chicks how to hunt. The male adult - Judson - was seen flying while holding prey, as Blakeley would fly under him, perhaps in an effort to learn how to catch prey while in the air.

Tuesday, June 18th: Blakeley and Stinson appear very healthy and content! In the coming weeks they will continue to learn to hunt, and range even further afield while doing so. Too far for us to follow. So, our watch comes to an end. A warm ‘Thank You’ to everyone who came out and watched with us, or assisted in any capacity this summer.

## **COMPARISON TO PREVIOUS YEARS**

This was the third consecutive year with Judson and McKeever as parents at the Sheraton. In both 2022 and 2023 they successfully fledged four healthy chicks! Three chicks hatched on April 26 and 27, a few days earlier than even the early dates of 2023. One egg did not hatch and one chick died later in the nest. This was the first year that only two of four eggs matured into fledged Peregrine Falcons. The watch began early, in anticipation of potentially higher winds downtown caused by intensive development of tall buildings around the watch area. Falconwatch organizers did not want a repeat of

2023 when chicks were blown from the nest ledge before the watch began. Luckily, our fears did not materialize in 2024. The watch ended on Tuesday, June 18, three weeks after it began. There were no rescues needed. The two surviving chicks, Blakeley and Stinson, seemed very hesitant to leave the nest until they were absolutely confident in a positive result. After an initial scare (night flight!) and a few days of awkwardness the chicks very quickly became competent fliers.

There was great media coverage in commercial publications this year, with frequent calls for more volunteers due to the presence of three apparently healthy chicks. Despite this effort, it was found to be difficult to attract as many volunteers as there were in previous years, especially during the second half of the watch. As at last year's banding, a senior research scientist from Environment Canada took blood samples from each chick to investigate the possible presence of contaminants of concern. The start of the watch began with very shaky first flights from the Peregrine chicks. Despite this, both surviving chicks were observed completing strong, long flights over downtown and even catching their own prey by end of Falconwatch. This year, the chicks favoured the BDC building very heavily in comparison to other years, spending most of their daytime there after they had left the nest. The chicks seemed to be much more advanced than previous years, making strong flights early in their development. They would spend much of their time in the last week of the watch practicing their hunting in downtown Hamilton.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Listed below are various recommendations for the future Falconwatch years:

- The current length of volunteer shifts has been working well and allows people to book a short shift, or if they feel like it they can book multiple for a longer stay.
- Provide a shift sign-up sheet at the orientation to allow interested people to sign up the same day and make a commitment.
- Location of peregrine parents should be maintained as second priority when the chicks have begun to fly.
- The main goal of volunteers is to monitor the location and safety of the peregrines, but we need to make sure that it is always an enjoyable experience - it should be noted that volunteers do not have to follow directions from other volunteers or anyone else other than the volunteer coordinators.

The watch this year was run smoothly and efficiently, leaving us with only a few recommendations.

## **CONCLUSION**

This year we were faced with challenges that were out of our control in regards to Westdale and the unhatched egg. However, with our two healthy and grown chicks Blakeley and Stinson, we still had a successful year, with not one rescue needed. The two proved to be strong flyers, and the parents McKeever and Judson provided them with all they needed to become successful adult peregrines. The Facebook page and online blog were both run efficiently and allowed volunteers and interested people

alike to be updated on the whereabouts and growth of the peregrine chicks. It was a very successful year for both the peregrines and Falconwatch.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

So many people help out to make Falconwatch such a success. We can't acknowledge all of them, but some of the key players are listed below:

Hamilton Naturalists' Club: project management, volunteers, coordinators, video cameras.

Colin Watson (general manager), Ryan Iverson (Maintenance Manager) and the staff at the Sheraton Hotel for providing the room for banding and storing our rescue boxes overnight and roof access.

Jennifer Atkinson and the David Braley Health Sciences Centre staff and security, for their ongoing support, storage facility and a room for the volunteer orientation.

For the banding of the chicks, the Canadian Peregrine Foundation (CPF) a nonprofit national charitable organization dedicated to the recovery of the Peregrine Falcon. Mark and Marion Nash have devoted many years and have attended the banding of Peregrine Falcon chicks from Ottawa to Windsor to Niagara, documenting information and providing bands. We are sad to announce that Marion Nash passed away in the spring of this year. We were grateful to have Mark at this year's banding. Still grieving the loss of Marion, he arrived with his volunteers, Cathy Kerr and Lucie Kirchknopf. Anne Yagi, a retired biologist from the MNR, was able to band the chicks for us once again. We could not do this without the backing of so many people.

The Owl Foundation for consultation on Westdale and for ongoing help and support as needed.

Stelco Tower security.

Our volunteers who gave so much of their time to ensure the safety of our chicks. Many of our volunteers have been with us year after year. We are happy to report that we had several new volunteers and hope they will be available to help us out again next year.

Pat Baker, our Lead Monitor, for all of her organizational skills and for her relationship with the businesses that assist us.

Charles Gregory, our webmaster, for his dedication to the website and putting out numerous calls for volunteers and donations.

Sandra Davey, Mountsberg Raptor Centre (Conservation Halton), for training our rescue team again this year.

Leah Schwenger, for coordinating volunteers and organizing volunteer events.

Mary Anne McDougall, for organizing TimeToSignUp, the online sign in for our volunteers to cover shifts and also for her articles in the Wood Duck and North End Breezes.

Christa Jackson, for advertising the Coordinator positions, for her Wood Duck article and also for designing, making and providing prizes for the volunteers. Every shift was entered in the draw.

Marzuk Gazi, one of our earlier Coordinators, for helping edit the final report.

Our climbers Jesse Pappin and Christa Jackson. Christa is qualified and was able to step in at the last moment to help retrieve the chicks for the banding.

Our donors, for generously supporting Falconwatch through donations to the Hamilton Naturalists' Club

Judy Bailey, for bringing Jager, her juvenile peregrine falcon to the volunteer picnic at Bayfront Park

Larry Vollick and Kay Johnson, long-time volunteers, for donating new rescue boxes.

Sara Shwadchuck, for providing us with buttons designed by Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington showing the peregrine falcon as the city bird of Hamilton. These were handed out to our volunteers.