

Chicago Peregrine Release Hack Site Report
September 1, 1987

by
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I. Personnel at Site: Laurie Birk, Dan Dinelli, Terry Donovan, Matt Gies, Vivian Grant, Rich Hamilton, Katherine Hunt, Jessie McCoy, Marilyn Merkle, Cliff Miller, Andrew Neill, Sara Ranney, John Spoden, Mark Spreyer, Roger Tucker & Elaine Vercruyssen.

II. Description of Site: The hack site was located on the top floor of a 10-story water tower on the Fort Sheridan US Army base. A two-story building extends to the east and west of the tower, each with seven paired chimneys. Each of these chimneys was capped with wire mesh. Immediately to the North of the tower is a golf course, from which most of the observations were made. Approximately 1/2 mile to the east is Lake Michigan. To the south and west are Army buildings and the suburban town of Highwood. Thirty miles south, along the lakefront, is Chicago.

The hackbox measures 8'x4'x3'. It spans two of three east-facing windows. Two sides contain one-way glass for viewing the falcons, but it was found that at dusk, this appeared to be an empty "hole" through which the falcons thought they could escape.

The glass was taped up leaving four 1"x1" peep-holes. The hackbox was placed inside the tower, the barred opening flush with the window.

Each window of the tower has a one-foot wide ledge. Four turrets surround the tower, each of which has 2 ledges, approximately 4" wide, just below the rounded top. The roof of the tower was sloped and made of metal. The birds were able to perch and move about comfortably on the gutters surrounding the roof. These perches were used extensively by all the peregrines.

To enhance the perching space available to the falcons, several modifications were made to the tower. An 8' long perch was made using 2" PVC pipe wrapped in hemp rope and secured approximately 14" beyond the window ledge with metal brackets. A hack board was attached to the remaining east window and later a second hack board was added to a north window. The east board and the PVC perch were close enough so that a peregrine could easily hop-flap between them.

III. History and Detail of Young

Name/Midwest Band#	U.S.F.W.S. BAND #	Sex	Wing Marking L / R	Date Age
McArthur Y03	816-21905	M	BOR BOR	June 2 35 days
Exocet P06	987-20745	F	PK BOR	June 2 35 days
Phoenix P08	816-21906	F	YEL --	June 2 32 days
Poindexter P09	877-42523	F	YEL BOR	June 2 35 days
Ollie P10	877-42517	F	OR --	June 2 34 days
Nicargua P11	987-20744	F	PK --	June 2 36 days
PeriGreen Y12	816-21915	M	YEL YEL	June 23 34 days
Dart Y13	816-21916	M	-- FOR	June 23 33 days
Pegasus Y14	816-21917	M	FOR YEL	June 23 33 days
Tammy P14	877-42520	F	-- PK	June 23 38 days
Icarus Y15	816-21918	M	PK PK	June 23 33 days

BOR= "blaze" orange, PK=pink, YEL=yellow, FOR= "fire" orange

IV. Pre-release Details:

A. Group I: A press conference was held at noon on June 2 at the Fort Sheridan Community Club. At approximately 1330, the six peregrine falcons were placed in the hack box.

Perches were extensively used only by 03 and 09, although all birds hop-flapped between perches as days progressed toward release. All birds exhibited wing beating and preening activity, both of which became more intense as birds became older. 03 began thrusting his head between the bars of the hack box at week's end.

B. Group II: 5 falcons arrived and were immediately placed in the hack box at 1130 on 23 June. They remained in the hide until 1700. There were several vocal exchanges with older birds who returned to the outside hackboards to feed. 14P was particularly noisy, often continuing to scream for several minutes after the older bird had left.

With the exception of the greater use of perches, the second group was very similar in behavior to the first.

V. Release Details:

Midwest Band #	Sex	Date & Time Released	Age at Release	Time to 1st Flight	Return to Box After Flight
Y03Y	M	09 June 0818	42	42 min.	33 hrs.
P06P	F	09 June 0818	42	2 days 2 hrs	08 hrs.*
P08P	F	09 June 0818	39	3 days 23 hrs	50 hrs.
P09P	F	09 June 0818	42	3 days 23 hrs	2 days
P10P	F	09 June 0818	41	10 hrs	01 hr.*
P11P	F	09 June 0818	43	4 days 06 hrs	03 hrs.*
Y12Y	M	30 June 1200	41	07 hrs	48 hrs.
Y13Y	M	30 June 1200	40	07 hrs	22 hrs.
Y14Y	M	30 June 1200	40	07 hrs	16 hrs.
P14P	F	30 June 1200	45	04 hrs	43 hrs.
Y15Y	M	30 June 1200	40	08 hrs	01 hr.

* See below for details.

Just prior to release, each falcon was marked on the wing with Nybco fluorescent paint (see chart in section III). The hide door for the first group was opened at 0818. 03 flew at 0900, went around tower, and was lost from sight. He was not seen again until 0920 the following day. Four out of the six remaining Group I birds did not use the PVC perch regularly until 12 June.

Three of the birds had "unsuccessful" first flights. The first of these was 10, who flew to golf course at 1835 on June 09. When it became apparent that she could not return on her own, she was caught and placed back into the box.

The next premature flier was 06. She flew to a chimney at 1010 on June 11. At 1756 a hard rain began. Around 1800, 06 began to fly around. She flew into the side of a nearby building where she clung to a 1" wide ridge running along the wall. After clinging for about a minute, she fell at 1816. She was retrieved beneath tower by attendants and 2 firemen and returned to the hack box.

In the evening of June 13, at 1650, 11 was found trying to cling to the side of a building. She fell and walked into the street where the attendant caught her and took her back to the hack box. All Group I falcons were flying competently by 14 June.

By comparison, the second group falcons were very quick to mature. 14P, the first Group II falcon to fly, left the box two hours after opening. After an additional two hours, all the rest of the Group II birds were on the PVC perch. Within eight hours after the opening of the box, all the falcons had taken their first flights. No birds from second group had to be retrieved as in the previous group.

There was some interaction between the two groups of falcons.

Before the younger birds were released, extended vocalizations were exchanged when the older falcons returned to the hack site for food. 11 tried to enter the hack box from the outside.

After release, the younger falcons routinely begged food from the older birds. The older birds would fly to the tower, get a quail, return to a chimney on which a younger bird was roosting, fight over it for a few seconds, then give it up to the younger bird.

VI. Hunting Behavior: On June 22, a peregrine was observed chasing a goldfinch. Numerous pigeon chases occurred during the time of study, as well as games of tag between the peregrines themselves. On 06 July, one peregrine was observed to grab a pigeon out of a nest, drop it, and then proceed to chase it. She was immediately joined by a second peregrine. Military people reported a peregrine kill on the lawn in front of the base HQ on 06 July. Upon investigation, attendants found a swath of pigeon feathers. 09 was seen by one of the attendants taking a pigeon near the post exchange on 09 July just before 1800. Another kill was seen at the finance building (located approximately 1/2 mi. south of hack site) by one of the Group II birds on July 24, and yet another was seen outside the veterinary building on July 23. The latter appeared to have been killed by 12.

Birds seen in the vicinity of the hack site included: rock dove (Columba livia), barn swallow (Hirundo rustica), chimney swift (Chaetura pelagica), eastern bluebird* (Sialia sialis), American robin (Turdus migratorius), red-headed and downy* woodpeckers (Melanerpes erythrocephalus and Picoides villosus), American kestrel (Falco sparverius), killdeer* (Charadrius vociferus), ring-billed and herring gulls (Larus delawarensis and argentatus), house sparrow (Passer domesticus), goldfinch (Carduelis tristis), red-tailed hawk (Buteo jamaicensis) and crow (Corvus brachyrhynchos).
* Rarely seen

VII. Roosting Behavior: Much roosting behavior was observed on the chimneys of the building extending east and west of the water tower. Also the gutter of the tower roof proved to be a favorite spot. After about a week, the falcons ranged farther to the finance building, and also began roosting in trees. A favorite playing area for the birds was above the bluffs along the lake to the east and northeast of the tower, and also on the golf course, particularly after a rain. Group I birds were sometimes seen roosting also on large horizontal military radio antennas near the lake and almost directly east of the tower.

VIII. Dispersal:

Midwest <u>Band#</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Last Seen Eating at box</u>	<u>Last Seen at Site</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>No. Days After Release</u>
Y03Y	M	July 23	July 23	86	41
P06P	F	July 18	July 19	82	40
P08P	F	July 24	Aug 14	105	66
P09P	F	July 20	July 20	83	41
P10P	F	June 16	June 16	48	07
P11P	F	July 8	July 15	79	36
Y12Y	M	Aug 11	Aug 11	83	42
Y13Y	M	Aug 02	Aug 02	73	33
P14P	F	Aug 09	Aug 09	85	40
Y14Y	M	Aug 10	Aug 10	81	41
Y15Y	M	Aug 02	Aug 02	73	33

As of the writing of this report, immature falcons from this year's release have been seen from Milwaukee to Lake Calumet.

IX. General Evaluation of Falcons:

Group I:

03 and 09 were the dominant pair. Although there were plenty of perches available, they were rarely used by anyone other than these two. 03, despite his evident rule over the roost, was not very aggressive.

06 was the third falcon on the totem pole. She seemed to enjoy footing the other falcons and pecking 03.

08 spent much of her time inside the hide. She was fairly quiet, and rarely fought with her siblings.

10 was the last of the birds to mature. She was often seen huddling with 08 and sometimes 11.

11 appeared imprinted on humans from the first day she arrived. During the first weeks after release, she squawked loudly whenever anyone came near. By the fourth week, however, this behavior seemed to diminish.

Group II:

12 was very active, and the most advanced of the group. He enjoyed a lot of hop-flapping between perches and siblings. Unlike 03, 12 was an aggressive feeder.

14P, the only female in the second group, was a influential bird in the box, and was the first to fly. She was also the main noisemaker of the group, cacking for extended periods of time when any falcon came near her.

15, 14Y and 13 were subordinate birds. 15 was the shiest of the group, and spent much time in the hide.

X. Unusual Incidents:

A. 10 June, 1855. Earthquake. The attendant appeared more unnerved than the falcons.

B. 10 was "lost" early in the project. She was last seen on 16 June, and is listed as Missing In Action.

XI. General Evaluation of Site and Comparison to University Hall Site: This site had several advantages over last year's at University Hall, and several disadvantages.

Because the base is more rural than the city, observing the falcons was easier. Identification of individual birds, virtually impossible at the University Hall site, was usually not difficult this year.

Fort Sheridan is a much more discrete community than the area surrounding University Hall. Therefore we were able to benefit from the military social network. The main observation point on the golf course was very visible, which greatly increased the interest in the project on base. This meant that more time was spent in public education of military personnel concerning the project. Because of this increased awareness, we received numerous reports of peregrine kills and events that we would not ordinarily have been aware of.

The high interest level on base also led to minor irritations and perhaps more human contact with the falcons than last year. Due to their use of low-level perches, and their appearances on the golf course, the falcons seemed less afraid of people than was ideal. However, even the partially imprinted bird (11) became moderately wary of people in the environment, and so this is not expected to be a problem.

At University Hall, the falcons had a large roof on which to exercise and take short flights. At Fort Sheridan, despite the addition of perching space to the tower, there was less opportunity for the falcons to experiment with short flights. This fact probably was in part responsible for the three retrievals of Group I birds. It should be noted that all of the Group II birds successfully completed their first flights without incident.

Security at Fort Sheridan was not as consistent as it was at University Hall. There was often confusion about how the locking and unlocking of the door to the tower would be handled. Because of this confusion, the location of the keys was at times in question. During the hacking process, a workable procedure was established.

XI. Equipment: Borrowed from Central Camera: One Bushnel spotting scope with tripod. From Ameritech: one cellular phone.

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