

## -The History

### An Account of Peregrine Falcons Successfully Nesting in Kalamazoo

By Russ Schipper

This is an account of Peregrine Falcons' eventual successful nesting in Kalamazoo and the role that the Audubon Society of Kalamazoo (ASK) was able to play.

Late 2009

A Peregrine Falcon was seen on a regular basis near the fifteen story Fifth Third Bank building in downtown Kalamazoo.

2010

Two peregrines were seen in the area and apparently attempted to nest, probably in a drain on a high ledge of the bank building. The male was unbanded (many of the falcons have leg bands for identification purposes), and the female was banded and identified as Idelle.

2011

A pair of peregrines was present again; however, this time it was a different female, Rebecca. She turned up in late April and ousted Idelle from the territory (it is more common for the male to stay on a territory and the females to change territories). From her leg band, we know that Rebecca hatched in South Bend, IN in 2009. It is assumed, but not known, that the same male has been here since at least 2009. They mated, and the female laid three eggs in the drain on the high ledge of the bank building. These eggs were washed away by heavy rain, a consequence that likely matched the previous year's attempt. The birds stayed around through the winter.

2012

This was the first year of Audubon Society of Kalamazoo's field trips to watch the peregrines from the top level of a nearby parking ramp. Peregrine Falcons are on the Michigan Endangered Species list, and are monitored by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The early days of the DNR's peregrine efforts were taken care of by DNR staff in Lansing, but recently the responsibility was transferred to local jurisdictions. Prompted by concern from ASK members about the previous failed nesting attempts of the peregrines, the field trip coordinator, Russ Schipper, contacted the local DNR Wildlife Biologist, Mark Mills, to ask how ASK might help our local birds.

That inquiry subsequently led to a conversation with Fifth Third Bank officials who were supportive and willing to help the birds by becoming falcon landlords. In the first part of May, a nest box built by Mark Mills, his sons and father, was installed on the roof of the bank. Unfortunately, likely due to the birds having already selected their nest site or the unsuitability of a roof mounted box (a ledge on the face of a cliff is much more to their liking), they did not use the box and instead, used the same drain with the same result: another failure. The roof box was subsequently taken down.

2013

Rebecca and presumably the same unbanded male spent the winter in the area. After some discussion among the Fifth Third Bank officials, Mark Mills, and ASK, the current site was selected

for the nest box. This much better site is on the southeast corner parapet at the level of the 13th floor, just a little lower than the old drain nest site. The bank wanted assurance that the box would be securely mounted and required that a structural engineer design the framework and oversee installation. ASK was asked to coordinate that and enlisted the help of Nehil – Sivak Consulting Structural Engineers and Building Restoration, Inc. Both firms were very enthusiastic about volunteering for the project and donated their time and materials. The new box was installed on April 24. However, by that time, the birds had once again already chosen their nest site for the season and used the drain unsuccessfully.

2014

The peregrine pair again spent the winter in the area, and after a year it was hoped they would acclimate to the box and accept it. To everyone's pleasure, they did. On March 7, a falcon watcher sent a photo showing a falcon perched at the box and another flying behind. From then on, the nesting cycle went very well. Based on several photographs of the four chicks as they become active at the box entrance, the hatch date was estimated to be May 14-15. Counting back for an average incubation period of 30 days, the egg laying date was estimated to be April 15-16.

The DNR planned to band the young on June 13. However, by that time, the chicks were too big and active to reach safely, so the plan was abandoned. The chicks fledged about June 20. Drama ensued on June 23rd when one of the chick's flight attempts didn't go well, and it ended up on the pavement in the alley. Raptor rehabilitator, Sharon Butler, came to the scene and brought the chick to Veterinarian Dr. Chuck Mehne of the Animal Clinic in Kalamazoo. Despite the rough landing, the chick was fine and he was sent to a rehabilitation facility for a few extra days of flight lessons. He was banded while he was at the rehabilitation facility and was returned and released near the nest box where he successfully reunited with his family. The Fifth Third Bank wanted to commemorate the event and solicited name proposals from the community. Representatives from the Fifth Third Bank, Kalamazoo Gazette, and ASK, eventually named the young bird "Promise."

On average, two nestlings are successfully fledged per nest per year. Mr. and Mrs. Rebecca were the proud parents of four fledged chicks in 2014. However, on August 6, staff from Bronson Hospital reported that a peregrine was found dead on the grounds. Apparently one of the young birds had crashed into a window, though remarkably still had half-eaten prey in its talons. With most birds, roughly half do not survive their first year. There is a lot for them to learn and a lot of dangers they face. As disappointing as it was, that is very much a part of nature. However, the other fledglings continued to be spotted in the area of the bank for several more weeks. Because two of the chicks were not banded, we will never know their fate, but, thanks to Promise's less than perfect flight attempt, we may learn of him if he turns up in another city and is able to be identified by his specific band. Because he is a male, the colors are a red over black band combination and a silver band with his number. The remaining young were occasionally seen, though as is the case with many birds, the parents eventually chased them away from the area. In the interest of genetic diversity, this is very important.

With this successful nesting Kalamazoo is now one of about 35 sites in Michigan that have had at least one successful nest between 1990 and 2014. Of those, seven sites have been on cliffs in the Upper Peninsula. Before 1990, there were no known nests in the state. This was because of the

decimation of Peregrine Falcons in Michigan and the whole Eastern United States due to the widespread spraying of chemicals, such as DDT to control mosquitos.

2015

The pair of Peregrine Falcons remained in Kalamazoo for the winter and have been seen visiting their nest box from time to time. Thanks to generous support from Zoetis, two cameras and a microphone were installed in January and now the community will be able to keep tabs on their favorite falcons during this nesting season.