



2024 Puget Sound Peregrine Project: Annual Report

This year we followed 11 sites at seven urban and four wild eyries. We'll mostly focus on the Seattle sites, where an exceptional team of volunteers sorted themselves among five sites, with unique events lighting up at each site as the season moved along. Two falcon cams allowed season-long viewing at the nests high on 1201 3rd Ave. and AGC in Seattle.

Fledglings

At the urban sites, 21 peregrines fledged, 15 from Seattle and six from Tacoma. As of early November, 15 (71.4%) are not known dead, a remarkable success rate, due in large part to those exceptional volunteers. In the three active wild eyries in the east King County foothills (Snoqualmie Falls, Olallie State Park, Rattlesnake Ledge), eight youngsters fledged without mishap.

Banding in the Nest

We were fortunate to have opportunities to band nine eyasses in the nest at three sites: downtown Tacoma (4), West Seattle Bridge (2), and the AGC building on South Lake Union (3). This would not be possible without substantial support from the property managers at 1201 Pacific (Tacoma) and AGC (Seattle), and from SDOT, who facilitated access to the eyrie under the West Seattle Bridge. For 30 years, eyasses nesting at the top of 1201 3rd Ave. have also been banded, but this year's banding was canceled while the building's original window-washing stages were replaced.

Record Early Laying

The **1201 3rd Ave.** nest, the flagship site for Seattle peregrines since 1994, broke a record for early laying. The first egg appeared on February 25, a month earlier than usual, tying the previous earliest laying date in 2006 at East Channel Bridge. Thus began a very long field season: the two 1201 fledglings launched just as eggs were hatching at all the other sites.

Rescues and Reunions

Most of the Seattle fledglings screwed up their first flight. Even the ones that got it right were later rescued after window strikes or hitting the water; falcon expert Bud Anderson compares the perilous early fledge time to giving a teenager a Ferrari. The most important job for URC volunteers is to predict fledging dates at each site and keep vigil while each youngster leaves the eyrie. Much more could be told than space allows, but in short, the fledglings emphatically made clear that bridge nesters will drown without intervention, and the rest will try to die in traffic. We rescued 12, who all did time at PAWS Wildlife Center before they were released in good health and reintroduced to their families.

Peregrines have long childhoods. After fledging, the young remain with their parents for many weeks while they learn the difficult skill of hunting on the wing. Successfully reuniting a rehabbed young peregrine with its parents is not guaranteed, and rejection means death. Lots of practice this season provided a crash course in what makes a successful reunion. At least 10 of our 12 reintroductions were successful.

West Seattle Bridge nestlings 65-AK (left, female) and 23-BH (right, male) after banding in early June. (Jim Riley)





West Seattle Bridge fledgling 23-BH's post-rehab release day in early July. Life is hard. (Jim Riley)

Fights and Turnovers

We saw plenty of evidence of adult competition early in the season, suggesting a healthy floater population of peregrines seeking a territory. First, two talon-to-talon clashes were witnessed over South Lake Union near the AGC eyrie just as laying had begun. Around the corner at Portage Bay Bridge and also just before egg laying, the long-resident king of the ship canal, banded 17-AD, was replaced by an unbanded male. Finally, the resident male at East Channel Bridge met a traumatic end just as his four offspring were fledging. More on that next.

Banded as a fledgling in 2015 at East Channel Bridge, 17-AD had nested for seven years at successive bridges along the canal: Ballard, University, and ultimately Portage Bay Bridge. Although handsome and a diligent provider for his young, his nest sites were consistently disastrous and many of his young drowned. One fortunate exception was daughter A-78, a 2019 alumna of University Bridge. She survived two water rescues as a fledgling and in 2022 was seen in Vancouver, BC, probably nesting. We will miss seeing 17-AD on his traditional perch atop the mast of the sailboat Cygnus.

How Do Peregrines Grieve? By Taking Another Mate

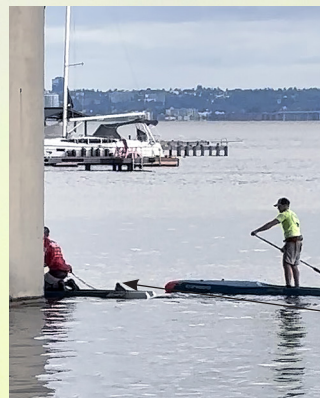
East Channel Bridge's drama began with the death of the resident male. Back in April, this unbanded male chased a pigeon into a roofless, glassed-in courtyard at the VA hospital in South Seattle and became trapped. (This is the fourth such entrapment at the VA — three of a breeding male — in as many years, but that's a different sad story.) He was rescued and banded (black left 20-BC) by Ed and Patti and appeared back on his territory sporting new jewelry.

Four fledged from the middle of the bridge, and during a head-spinning couple of weeks, all were either rescued from the water or picked up flightless from the shore, routed to PAWS, and eventually returned to the bridge to reunite with their parents. On June 12, in the middle of all this fledging and rescuing, 20-BC was mortally injured in a probable territorial fight, leaving his mate to hunt for four large, hungry youngsters while also defending them from the increased attention of nearby eagles, who had their own young to feed. The last rescued fledgling here was picked up by two paddleboarders who happened to see her splashing in midchannel, knocked into the water by a feeding scum. When she was picked up and put into a carrier, she was far lighter than normal. Starvation was imminent.

Twelve days after being widowed, mom was courted at the bridge by TWO adult males, both feeding the young — averting the fledglings' prospects of starvation in the nick of time. One adult male prevailed (banded 05-AD, a 2022 graduate of 1201 3rd Ave.). As confirmation of this reversal of fortune, in September, two banded female fledglings hung out for a few weeks at a Bellevue condo less than three miles away and were fed by a banded adult male. These were almost certainly two daughters from East Channel Bridge and their stepfather 05-AD.

West Seattle Bridge Pilgrim

West Seattle Bridge fledged two, a male and a female. Both flunked fledging and were rescued: the male (23-BH) disappeared for a day in the trucking yard below the eyrie, and the female (65-AK) glided to a vacant lot right next to busy West Marginal Way. After their stint at PAWS, both fledglings were spectacularly reunited with their parents. In a pilot project, each fledgling was fitted with a tiny solar-powered transmitter on its color-ID band (more on this in our forthcoming URC annual report). URC volunteer Tracy Slatten on his trusty ebike tracked the tagged fledglings around their natal territory in the West Seattle Bridge industrial area almost daily for weeks. 65-AK disappeared within a couple of weeks, but her brother, 23-BH, was seen for at least 5 weeks. On August 5, a month after fledging, 23-BH was photographed at the mouth of the Cedar River in Renton, eight miles away. He was seen back at the bridge the next day and only intermittently since then. Dispersal had begun.



Paddleboard peregrine rescue (Patti Loesche)

Fledgling

The Runaway

Another rescue was a male fledgling from **Portage Bay Bridge** who glided from his nest to a nearby marina, unable to fly. On July 3, after a week of flight practice at PAWS and now banded 14-V, he was released at the bridge in the presence of his parents and two siblings. Ideal circumstances for a reunion. However, Mr. 14-V had other ideas. He flew away from the site and disappeared. On July 7, four days later, a volunteer near the AGC site on South Lake Union counted three fledglings when there should have been just two. AGC is less than a mile from Portage Bay. On July 9, 14-V was photographed from a 10th-floor office window as he perched next to the AGC eyrie. What?? Although he was not driven off the territory, he remained separate from his siblings for a few days, and it was uncertain whether he was being fed or had to scavenge for food. Finally he was seen sharing a pigeon with his adopted siblings. The runaway had found a new home. Why? How? Your guess is as good as ours. As of early November, he was still begging and being fed by his foster parents at AGC. Fortunately for 14-V, peregrines are not good at math.



Portage Bay fledgling 14-V arrives at AGC (Anne Hilton)



32-BC takes a dive (Matt Cryan)

Not a Quitter

Five eggs were laid at the **AGC** nest. Eggs are typically laid a day or two apart, and incubation usually begins after the third egg is laid. Delayed incubation ensures that eggs laid days apart hatch at about the same time.

Instead, egg laying at this site sprawled over 15 days; the second egg was laid six days after the first, and the next three were laid every three days. Two eggs hatched. A week later, a third egg hatched, but the tiny eyass lived less than a day. The next day, another white fluff appeared — a fourth eyass. We expected that it too would perish, but don't second-guess a peregrine. In asynchronous broods such as this one, the fate of last-hatched chicks depends on maternal care. In this case, the lucky latecomer, later identified as a female, was always in front of her two older, larger male siblings at feeding times, and mom fed her as much as she could eat. Once, the little one wobbled out of the nest while following her mobile brothers but couldn't get back in; at dusk, mom picked her up with her beak and sat on her.

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23-BH at the Cedar River mouth in August

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In early July, the two AGC brothers were close to fledging, while little sister (now banded 32-BC), a week younger and still downy, was running around but not yet using her wings. Dad flew in with prey to the balcony ledge in front of the nest, to the great excitement of the three siblings. The brothers flew up to the ledge, and little sister, who had never done that before, also leapt up — and over the ledge. To the horror of many watchers, the downy chick sailed down 10 floors to the marina below. Had she crash-landed onto the dock, she would have died. Instead, fate splashed her into the water in a narrow gap between two boats. URC volunteers Matt Cryan and Thomas Einberger had just begun to react when an employee at the marina, who we know only as Randall, jumped into the water and grabbed the bird. He lobbed the not-quite-fledgling onto the dock, Thomas caught her, and Matt hauled Randall out of the water. Indignant 32-BC won a trip to PAWS for a vet exam (unhurt!) and remained there until she could fly.



Randall rescued 32-BC from the water (Patti Loesche)



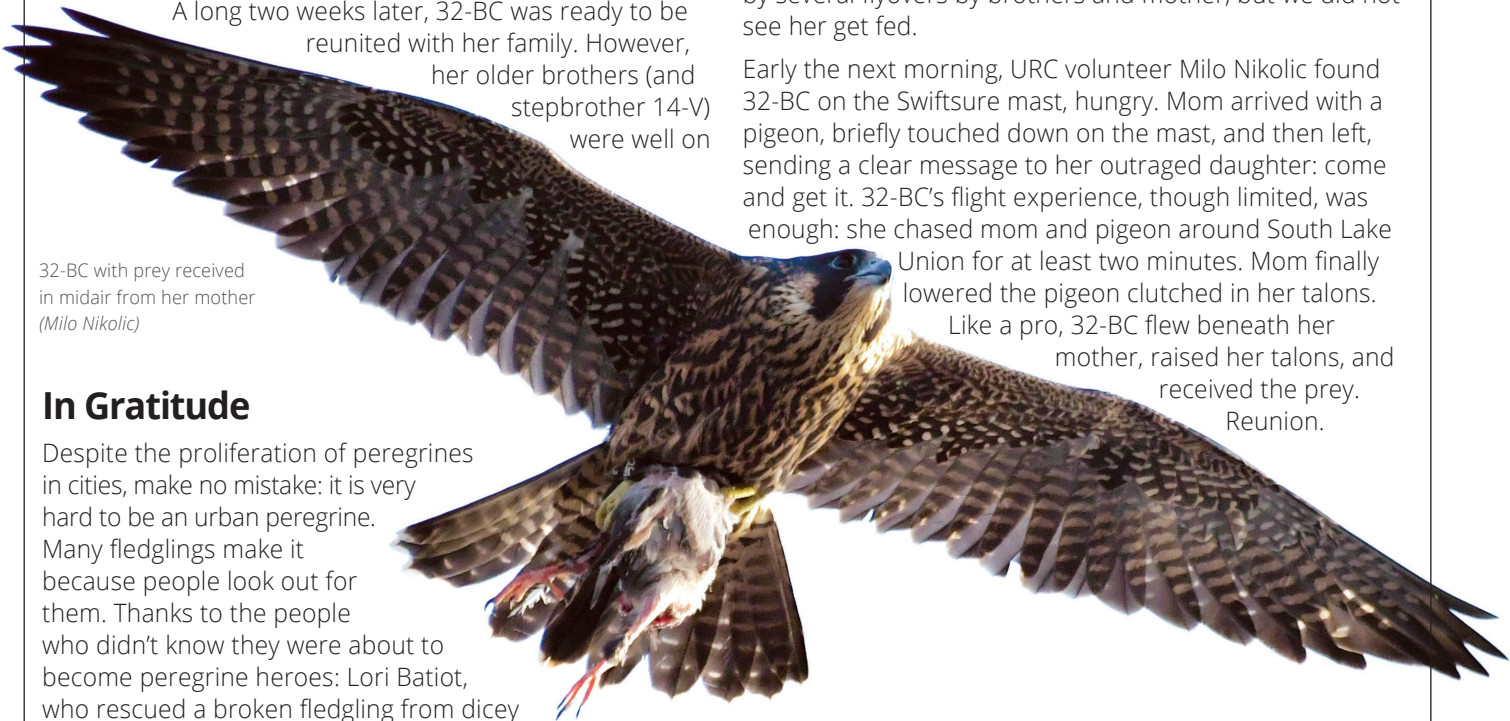
32-BC after her swim (Matt Cryan)

the wing, driving their Ferraris over the buildings of South Lake Union. On the hot day of her release, with no adults to be found, we finally released her near a brother perched on the mast of the Swiftsure lightship, a favorite peregrine lookout at the Museum of History and Industry. She spent the day on the roof of MOHAI and was tacitly acknowledged by several flyovers by brothers and mother, but we did not see her get fed.

Early the next morning, URC volunteer Milo Nikolic found 32-BC on the Swiftsure mast, hungry. Mom arrived with a pigeon, briefly touched down on the mast, and then left, sending a clear message to her outraged daughter: come and get it. 32-BC's flight experience, though limited, was enough: she chased mom and pigeon around South Lake Union for at least two minutes. Mom finally lowered the pigeon clutched in her talons.

Like a pro, 32-BC flew beneath her mother, raised her talons, and received the prey. Reunion.

A long two weeks later, 32-BC was ready to be reunited with her family. However, her older brothers (and stepbrother 14-V) were well on



32-BC with prey received in midair from her mother (Milo Nikolic)

In Gratitude

Despite the proliferation of peregrines in cities, make no mistake: it is very hard to be an urban peregrine. Many fledglings make it because people look out for them. Thanks to the people who didn't know they were about to become peregrine heroes: Lori Batiot, who rescued a broken fledgling from dicey company in downtown Seattle; Randall at Freedom Boats; Chris Grieve and Robb McEachran, who brought a floundering fledgling to shore on a paddleboard; and Mercer Island Police, especially Officer Tortorelli, who helped rescue another wet one. Deep thanks also to URC's hardworking and patient peregrine crew, and to WSDOT, SDOT, SPU, and the building managers and tenants at AGC, 1201 3rd, and 1201 Pacific. Peregrines don't love us back, and that is as it should be.

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