



ANDRE F. CHUNG: SUN STAFF

Renovations: Reynaldo Portillo applies caulk to the granite facing of the USF&G building. Workers have had to dodge angry falcons.

Beauregard, fifth mate due to hatch baby falcons

[Falcons, from Page 1B]

scientists now count 170 breeding pairs from Maine to Georgia, and west to the Mississippi. "We're doing quite nicely," Koppie said.

Because the recovery has surpassed its goals in all eastern regions, except the southern Appalachians, the government may remove peregrines from the endangered species list. But in some places they continue to suffer some eggshell thinning blamed on pesticide residues, he said.

In Baltimore, in addition to poisons, roofing tar and traffic, the falcons must now cope with corporate boardroom decisions. JSF&G has moved its operations from the downtown tower to Mount Washington. Legg Mason has leased the space and is gutting and renovating everything from the 20th to the 35th floor.

On the 33rd, only a small corner room was left to shield the nest from all the commotion.

Crews hired by USF&G have been gliding up and down the tower's granite facing on hanging platforms, recaulking the stone facing and dodging angry falcons.

"They'll fly by when we get near them," said John Young, a supervisor for C.A. Lindman Inc.

In February, the birds buzzed within three feet of Young's men as they dangled more than 30 stories up. As required by their contract, the crews finished work near the bird's ledge before the eggs arrived, and the aerial assaults have subsided.

"They'll get more aggressive after the babies are born," Young said. "We'll come back and do some small granite repairs," but not until the young have flown off.

Peregrines are tenacious with a good nest site, Barber said. Historically, some cliff sites were occupied for 8 to 10 generations, with one bird or the other being replaced as needed.

Maryland's restored peregrines have preferred man-made aeries, such as nesting towers on the Eastern Shore, and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. A pair on the Francis Scott Key Bridge produces eggs each year, but has never successfully fledged young. New birds have been spotted at Hart-Miller Island and the Route 301 Potomac River bridge to Virginia. None has adopted the species' traditional cliff-side aeries in western Maryland, which now suffer intrusions by rock climbers.

Baltimore's birds have provided Marylanders with a high-altitude soap opera for 19 years. It premiered in 1978 when a female named Scarlett was released by the Peregrine Fund and settled on the USF&G ledge.

Biologists released would-be mates for her, but the matches ended badly. Misha and Blue Meanie proved incompatible. Rhett was poisoned. Percy flew

Meet the peregrine falcon

The peregrine is a medium to large-sized falcon. Peregrine stems from the Latin word peregrinus for "wandering." Once known as the duck hawk, it has a maximum life span of 20 years. The population became almost extinct because of widespread use of the pesticide DDT, which caused eggshell thinning. The peregrine falcon has been listed as endangered for approximately 25 years.

Measurements

Female: 15-20 in. long, 37-39 in. wingspread, weighs 2-3 lbs.

Male: 14-16 in. long, 37-39 in. wingspread, weighs 1.5 lbs.

Habitat

Rocky cliffs near bodies of water, water towers, bridges. Does not build own nest; uses nests of eagles, hawks, ravens. Protects the nest aggressively, even against human intruders.

Reproduction

Lay 3-4 eggs. 33-35 day incubation period. Flies at 6 weeks old. Begins to breed at 2-3 years old.

Diet

Mainly pigeons and other medium to small-sized birds. Sometimes small mammals.



Coloring

Slate gray to bluish gray, black head and white chest with dark spotting underneath.

Enemies

Raccoons, bobcats, foxes, humans.

SOURCES: Encyclopedia of North American Birds, Hawks, Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey

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away. Ashley was shot, mended, then killed in traffic.

The fund brought Scarlett captive-bred babies, or eyases, which she raised for four years.

Beauregard, probably a wild tundra peregrine migrating through Baltimore, was drawn to the ledge by Scarlett's cries in July 1983, and began a 12-year record of reproductive successes.

When Scarlett died from an infection in 1984, Beauregard's calls attracted another female, Blythe, in four days. She had been born and banded in New Jersey.

In 1992, Blythe was found dead from unknown causes. But Beauregard's cries lured yet another female, Felicity.

Felicity produced four successful broods with Beauregard, but she vanished last spring, leaving five unhatched eggs in the ledge's gravel scrape.

Beauregard's cries soon drew Tara, a year-old bird born and banded on the Tappan Zee Bridge in New York. But she refused to care for Felicity's eggs. Four young died. One egg was infertile. "That was the first failure for the site in 17 nesting seasons," Barber said.

On Jan. 17, Tara was four near the Hyatt Regency Hotel, her leg broken. "The wonderful people at the [Baltimore] Zoo hospital were able to set the leg and help mend," Barber said.

Mike Cranfield, the zoo's head veterinarian, said Tara healed "exceptionally well" and was moved Wednesday to a rehabilitation center near Blacksburg, Va. She is eating live food and may eventually be released.

Beauregard couldn't wait. The old charmer quickly attracted a female. She, too, is banded, but her origins remain a mystery. "No one has been able to read enough of the band numbers yet to get an information," Barber said.

So who is this mysterious stranger? Will Tara recover her strength and fly to freedom? Will she head north to try to reclaim her lost aerie, and her mate?

"She may try to," Barber said. But he's not betting on her. "You have a new female there on eggs [and] that new female will be able to drive Tara away," he said. "With eggs, possession is nine-tenths of the law."

Stay tuned, Baltimore.

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