



## Rare falcon a pet topic among USF&G admirers

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Having a rare bird nesting outside your office might be a great conversation starter, but it has its unnerving moments, too.

Nine-to-fivers at the United States Fidelity and Guaranty home office at Charles and Light streets are delighted that a female peregrine falcon has made its home on a ledge outside the 33rd floor. The building has become something of an ornithological center.

It's just that there's something ghoulish about looking up to see the bird descending on a low-flying pigeon in full predatory attack. With talons outstretched it goes for the kill.

"Sometimes it's quite upsetting in the middle of lunch. It's not always the most savory experience. She flies high and swoops on a pigeon," says Joseph Tubman, who watches the spectacle from the eighth-floor offices of Baker & Watts.

The sentiment is echoed by Helen Meagher, supervisor of personal lines with Riggs, Counselman, Michaels & Downs located on the 10th floor. "A lot of people find it disturbing to watch a bird eat another bird. It makes them a little queasy," she says.

As for the secretaries at Price Waterhouse on the fifth floor, they say they haven't seen much of the bird, just leftovers from her dinner.

But nobody is complaining. The falcon, which was first observed at USF&G in February 1978,

has become a pet topic of conversation for many of the office workers in the building.

"Any new gossip about her is always discussed," says Tubman, an avid birdwatcher.

"It's just hearsay, but I heard they (scientists from the Peregrine Falcon Reintroduction Program at Cornell University) brought in a male for her, but he was eight years older and flew away.

"Being older I suppose he might have known about the responsibilities, you know. But I heard talk that they were going to get two younger males."

The falcon, which has been named Scarlett, was born at Cornell University's "Peregrine Palace," and released at Carroll Island, about 15 miles northeast of Baltimore.

Since she showed up at USF&G, the company has been working with Cornell and Edgewood Arsenal scientists to help her adapt to city living. A full-time observer has been appointed by the Peregrine program to watch her.

On April 4, she laid three eggs in a man-made nest on the ledge outside the 33rd floor. Since the eggs were not fertilized, scientists replaced them on May 3, with four baby chicks hatched at Cornell.

Peregrine falcons have become extremely rare in the eastern United States due to the effects of the insecticide DDT.

The Cornell program, one of several aimed at saving peregrine falcons from extinction, is the first in which the birds have been bred successfully in captivity and released.