FALCONWATCH 2025

Summary Report

For the Executives and Members of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club

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INTRODUCTION

The breeding population of Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus) had disappeared from Ontario by the mid-1960s. Bioaccumulation of the pesticide DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) caused widespread reproductive failure leading to a Canada-wide DDT ban by 1969.

In addition to the ban, a national reintroduction program was begun. Hacking of Peregrine Falcons involves obtaining chicks bred in captivity when they are a few weeks old and raising them with minimal human contact until they are ready to fledge and be released into suitable habitat. Between 1977 and 2006, approximately 600 Peregrine Falcons were released in Ontario through projects managed by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) and various naturalist organizations and corporations. In the Ontario Peregrine Falcon Recovery Strategy, section 1.3, https://www.ontario.ca/page/peregrine-falcon-recovery-strategy, a province wide Peregrine Falcon survey conducted in 2010 confirmed 119 nesting territories in Ontario. On 30 November 2011 the Peregrine Falcon status on the Species at Risk in Ontario list was changed from "Endangered" to "Special Concern", meaning they are no longer endangered or threatened but may become endangered or threatened due to a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats. (https://www.ontario.ca/page/peregrine-falcon).

Although DDT use was banned in Canada and the United States in the 1970s, "We should be alert to the possibility of other chemical risks emerging ….. such as flame retardants, and we would do well to heed the lesson that the 1960s threat to the Peregrine was discovered largely by accident" (Patrick Stirling-Aird, *Peregrine Falcon*, 2012, Firefly Books). As of April 2017, DDT is still being made in North Korea, India, and China and used in various "third world" countries. In addition to environmental contamination, the Peregrine continues to face risks [https://www.ontario.ca/page/peregrinefalcon-evaluation] due to human disturbance, habitat change or loss and erratic weather effects.

Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, the book which was most responsible for bringing the dangers of DDT to light, wrote, "Conservation is a cause that has no end. There is no point at which we say "Our work is finished." The Hamilton Falconwatch community has played, and will continue to play, an important and vital role in helping the Peregrine Falcon. From 1995 to 2025, 78 chicks have fledged from the Sheraton Hamilton nest. In that time Falconwatch volunteers carried out a total of 35 successful rescues of downed chicks. For the complete history of the adults and chicks from the Hamilton nesting site, visit [http://falcons.hamiltonnature.org] and click on the "History" Button/tab at top right.

AN OVERVIEW OF FALCONWATCH 2025

Falconwatch 2025 represents the 32nd consecutive year that Peregrine Falcons have nested on one of the upper window ledges of the Sheraton Hotel in Hamilton. The breeding pair, Judson (male) and McKeever (female), produced 4 eggs. McKeever laid the first egg on March 24th with single eggs following on March 26th, 28th and 31st. This year all four eggs hatched on the same day: May 3rd. On the 24th of May the four chicks were brought out of the nest by trained climbers and banded for identification. The silver band given to each Falcon has a unique identification number given by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service. A different coloured tape is given to each chick for identification of individual

birds at a distance. They also received their unique Canadian bands. Each chick was named at the banding: Lawfield (M-yellow tape), Winona (F-red tape), Charlton (M-blue tape) and Simcoe (F-white tape). The chicks quickly became more active and began to jump up on the nest ledge starting on the 26th of May. All four were spotted on the ledge on June 2nd.

Judson was often not on camera during the beginning of the watch, as he was out hunting, while McKeever would stay at the nest and transfer food from Judson to the chicks whenever it was delivered. The chicks were well fed, evidenced by their individual weight at banding, and they grew quickly.

Early on June 9th it was apparent Lawfield had left the nest overnight. After much searching he was found on the lower roof of the TD Coliseum (formerly Copps Coliseum). He took flight in the early evening of June 9th to the east side of the lower roof of the Thomson Building. On June 11th Charlton took flight to the corner of the Sheraton followed by Simcoe who glided to the north east corner of the Art Gallery of Hamilton. Winona made her first flight to the Thomson Building in the evening of June 14th.

Five rescues were needed with three requiring trips to the Owl Foundation. Lawfield was rescued three times (June 9th, 11th, 19th) and remained in their care for rehabilitation from June 19th until August 9th. Simcoe was rescued on June 13th and was checked out by the Owl Foundation. Winona came to ground on June 14th but was deemed healthy enough to be returned to the Sheraton roof without needing to be assessed.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Falconwatch are to:

- Observe and track the daily habits of the chicks while they are young, ensuring their safety and preparing for a rescue if one is needed.
- Monitor the growth and development of the peregrine falcon chicks, taking field notes to track important milestones such as helicoptering, first flights, learning how to hunt and so on.
- Inform and educate the public on the goals and importance of the falcon watch, the statistics and history of the peregrine falcons in the area, as well as how to get involved and help the falcon watch organization.
- Provide updates on the peregrine falcon adults and chicks by completing final reports at the end of the day as well as sending updates to social media for the public and volunteers to watch.

The objectives of the Falconwatch final report are to:

- Summarize the events of the 2025 falcon watch as well as provide an understanding of the overall duties and responsibilities of the falcon watch every year. A copy is sent to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (NDMNRF) and the Hamilton Naturalists' Club.
- Provide a permanent record of the highlights of the 2025 falcon watch including information about the banding of the chicks as well as their growth and development.

METHODOLOGY

Preparations for Falconwatch 2025

i. Rescue Team Training

A team of experienced volunteers was once again in place to help in the event of a Peregrine Falcon chick rescue. The members of the rescue team were on call to perform rescues during hours (6:00 AM to 9:00 AM) when a Coordinator was not on site. They also covered lunch and dinner breaks. Those who were available also acted as back-up for the Coordinators during the hours when they were on site (9:00 AM to 9:00 PM). On May 30th, 2025 the Coordinators, Lead Monitors and rescue team members took part in a training session at the Mountsberg Conservation Area's Douglas G. Cockburn Centre for Birds of Prey. The training was conducted by Sandra Davey, Coordinator, Animal Care and Programs (Conservation Halton) and former Falconwatch Coordinator. During the session the team was shown how to safely and effectively capture and restrain a grounded Peregrine. Portions of the OMNDMNRF protocol for dealing with a downed Peregrine were also reviewed.

ii. Contact with other Organizations

Prior to the start of the watch season, Lead Monitors Pat Baker and Leah Schwenger contacted the property and/or security managers of the following: Hamilton Sheraton Hotel, McMaster David Braley Health Sciences Centre, 100 King Street West (Stelco Tower, Real Properties), Ellen Fairclough Building, Standard Life Building, Core Entertainment (FirstOntario Centre, FirstOntario Concert Hall), Art Gallery of Hamilton, Bank of Montreal (BMO). They were given contact numbers for Lead Monitors and the Coordinators and watch information. The phone numbers for the person to contact in each building is on the pocket card the Lead Monitors, Coordinators and rescue team carry**,** and in the volunteer manual binder. Security at Stelco Tower had a list with names of those permitted to access the 20th floor.

iii. Volunteer recruitment

Volunteers who participated in previous Falconwatch seasons were contacted by a Lead Monitor and asked to participate in this year's watch. Calls for volunteers went out on the Hamilton Falconwatch website, Facebook and Instagram pages. This season many dedicated long-term volunteers and new volunteers joined the watch team and were an asset to the season's watch.

iv. Volunteer orientation

The volunteer orientation was held on May 22nd, 2024 at the Braley Health Sciences Centre. There were 63 attendees at the orientation including the Falconwatch members who gave the presentation. The

purpose of the session was to inform volunteers of their duties and to review procedures and use of equipment. Lead Monitor, Pat Baker, presented on the history of Hamilton Falconwatch and Judy Bailey and Sarah Varga went over the safety and rescue protocols. Instructions on taking notes to be kept in the field notes binder were explained by Marzuk Gazi. This year's Coordinators, **Matthew Mills** and **Lisa Millar (absent),** were announced and Matthew was introduced. Mary Anne McDougall explained the sign-up procedures for Time to Sign Up (timetosignup.com/falconwatch2025/).

Emails sent to volunteers@falcons.hamiltonnature.org are handled by Lead Monitor Leah Schwenger, and any volunteer experiencing difficulties with Time to Sign Up was redirected to Mary Anne McDougall. Parking options were explained before a period where the volunteers were given a chance to get answers to their questions.

v. Scheduling

The Coordinators were on watch from **June 2nd** to **June 29th, 2025.** The volunteer Falconwatch was conducted from **June 2nd** to **June 29th, 2025.** Volunteers were present to monitor the birds' activities from 6:00 AM to 9:00 PM (in two-hour shifts from 9:00 AM on). The Coordinators were present daily from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM. Volunteers were able to sign up for as many or as few shifts as they liked. The Coordinators had access to volunteer schedules each day through Time to Sign Up. At times throughout the season there were gaps in the volunteer schedule which were sometimes filled in response to a request for volunteers posted to the Hamilton Falconwatch Facebook and Instagram page as well as the Falconwatch website. Volunteers often offered to stay past their scheduled shifts to help fill gaps. Volunteers were urged to contact one of the Coordinators or the Lead Monitors if they were unable to attend a shift on short notice.

Watch Stations

i. ***McMaster University David Braley Health Sciences Centre ("Home Base")***

The north side of the David Braley building was considered home base during Falconwatch. Our main resources for the watch such as rescue boxes, the field notes and more were kept in Room 2005 on the second floor. The parking lot has a fantastic view of most of the areas the Falcon adults and chicks go. The Stelco tower, the Sheraton building and nest, BDC building, Homewood Suites and many smaller buildings could be seen from this area. This year we also watched from the SW corner of the building when the chicks were using the Bentley Place building on Caroline St. We also crossed Bay St. directly west of the David Braley Parking lot to watch the west side of the Standard Life building. Radios and chargers were kept at the Sheraton Hotel.

ii. ***King Street near Summers Lane***

This location was used often and is very close to the Sheraton. If one of the chicks were to fall out of the nest we would be able to see exactly where it landed as well as be able to get to the chick quickly and easily. It was an extremely important place to have a rescue trained person positioned when the chicks were active. *For safety reasons volunteers are reminded to stay off King Street and to watch from the south side of the street near the walls.*

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iii. ***Stelco Tower (20th floor)***

Stelco Tower was used as a lookout point mainly after the chicks had fledged. From the 20th floor you can see most of the roofs and spots that are otherwise not visible by camera or by volunteers on the ground. This was valuable to use if a chick went missing or went out of sight during a flight.

iv. ***Hamilton City Hall***

The Hamilton City Hall was a great location to view most of the buildings nearby and provided a slightly more south perspective which allowed volunteers to view different angles of the buildings than the other locations. This was a great resource to use to monitor BDC where adults and chicks were frequently seen.

v. ***Art Gallery of Hamilton, upper level***

The Art Gallery outer platform was a second location to view the Sheraton nest as well as both the BDC building and City Hall. It is close enough to King Street for another person to come and help a rescue.

vi. ***Jackson Square Plaza***

The Jackson Square Plaza played an important role once the chicks fledged as it gave us a northern viewpoint of the buildings which couldn't be seen from other locations. This was important to have to monitor falcon locations and locate birds when they went out of sight from other spots. This year the chicks frequently were spotted pancaked on the ledges of the north and east faces of the Stelco Tower during hot weather. At times they were very difficult to detect from below and required careful searching from various vantage points on the Jackson Square Plaza.

Data Collection

Data sheets containing daily field notes were kept in a binder and used by the coordinators and volunteers to record daily observations of the Peregrines' activities and times of occurrence. Activities recorded included rescues, feedings, flights by the fledglings, hunting attempts, interactions with other species and interactions between the Peregrine chicks and adults. Events which indicated the development of the chicks were also noted and any novel behaviour was emphasized. If time did not permit recording behaviours as they were happening an effort was made to record the event afterwards. For example, if two birds were in the air at once and the coordinator and/or volunteer was needed to keep track of the birds, notes could be made once they stopped flying. The volunteer who was at 'home base' at the David Braley building was responsible for recording the notes from calls which came in through the radio. The data recorder was asked to record observations without including any personal bias or opinion. If a particularly significant event happened the coordinator would make a point of asking the data recorder to note the event. The coordinators summarized each day's events in daily reports which were posted online and can be found on the Hamilton Community Peregrine Project (HCPP) website: http://falcons.hamiltonnature.org.

Rescue Procedures

A minimum of four rescue boxes were kept at the David Braley building. The rescue boxes were small cardboard veterinarian type animal carriers which contained cut resistant gloves, a rolled-up towel, and folded towels. If a rescue was required all needed supplies were easily transported to the rescue site. When we had a volunteer onsite at least one rescue box was kept at home base whilst the others were kept with volunteers stationed throughout downtown. During watch hours, when a volunteer was onsite and if a bird required rescuing, the volunteer was to maintain contact via two-way radio with the coordinator on duty and to follow their instructions. Only members of the rescue team were to perform rescues and do so according to the procedure which was explained during the rescue training. When a bird was in a precarious situation the volunteer and coordinator would communicate by two-way radio if the bird flew or changed positions. Volunteers, except the Rescue Team members, were not to touch a fallen bird unless necessary to remove it from imminent danger. However, they were to try to shield the bird from danger until the coordinator arrived on the scene to perform a rescue. Two boxes were kept overnight at Sheraton so that they could be accessed by the volunteer who was on at 6:00 AM, they contained the equipment required to start the morning's watch.

Five rescues were required in the 2025 season and details are provided in the section, 'A Brief Bio of the 2025 Peregrine Falcon Chicks'.

Equipment

A bin kept at home base contained the transponders, swipe card, binoculars, volunteer manual, safety vests and both human and bird first aid kits. Two marked permits for the David Braley parking lot were provided for Falconwatch. The swipe card used by the coordinator allowed 24-hour access to the David Braley Centre. Two additional swipe cards were kept by lead monitors. There were several extra binoculars available for the volunteers to use, a help for newer volunteers who often did not have binoculars of their own. The volunteer manual contained all of the important information for volunteers, many copies of a map of downtown Hamilton and a parking permit for the BMO parking lot and City Hall. At the end of each day the equipment required to begin the next morning's watch was put into a single rescue box and stored at the Sheraton Hotel along with the second rescue box. The rest of the equipment remained in a secure room (2005) at the David Braley Health Sciences Centre.

A set of two-way radios allowed for instant communications to call out the positions of falcons so that all of the members of the watch could hear, including webmaster Charles Gregory. Six radios were rented from Jannatec Technologies along with two extra battery packs and eight charging ports in total. It was critical to keep radios well charged. In the past these were charged and stored in our room at the David Braley Health Sciences Centre but a new policy cut power to the room in the evening and on the weekends. This year the Sheraton Hotel was kind enough to provide space for the Falconwatch chargers and radios. Charles Gregory, webmaster, also had a charger and radio.

Partners

The success of the Hamilton Community Peregrine Project (HCPP) this year and every year is in large part due to our many local partners. This year the project was supported by:

Sheraton Hamilton Hotel: nest ledge, video camera and webcam computer location, banding facilities, rescue box overnight storage, radios and radio charging
McMaster University, David Braley Health Sciences Centre Room 2005: primary Falconwatch site, volunteer training facility, storage for Falconwatch items, access to building during watch hours, parking
Hamilton Naturalists' Club (HNC): project management, volunteers, coordinators, video cameras
Real Properties Ltd.: access to the 20th floor of Stelco building as needed to check roof tops for chicks
Worldline: high speed internet access
Fibernetics Business Service: HCPP web server and internet access
Jannatec Technologies: two-way radios
Hamilton Video and Sound: technical expertise
Hanwha Vision: HD video camera #2
The Owl Foundation: peregrine falcon expertise and care
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF): Ontario Government authority overseeing all matters relating to Peregrine Falcons
Conservation Halton (Mountsberg Raptor Centre): Peregrine Falcon expertise, rescue training
Canadian Peregrine Foundation: arrangements for banding juvenile Peregrines
FOCFP: Friends Of Canadian Peregrine Foundation: supply of bands and banding
8Trees Inc.: banding, expertise
BMO: volunteer parking
Aquanova Brewery/Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington: beer, donations

Media Coverage

HCCP Video Cameras and Internet Website

The Falconwatch video cameras were once again extremely valuable tools. They are used to monitor the activity of adults and chicks and give us the capability to read leg bands. With the new video camera donated by Hanwha Vision in 2024, paired with our old pan-tilt-zoom camera, we are now able to closely observe two different locations at a distance which improves our ability to keep track of chicks and adults as they fly from one rooftop to another around the downtown core. This helps us maintain situational awareness even when all the birds are not within sight of watchers on the ground.

The HCPP website (http://falcons.hamiltonnature.org) displays and stores an archive of images uploaded live, year-round. The site is also used to post information about falcons and news updates on their activities such as laying, hatching, feedings and fledgings. During nesting season the site sees more than 1500 visitors per day with some of them watching the birds for hours. We've had over 225,000 visits in total since March 2025. On-street Falconwatch volunteers make use of the website images on their phones in order to help them keep track of birds in or near the nest but out of sight from street level.

Social Media

There is a Facebook group which is maintained and run by the HCPP called "Hamilton Falconwatch" (www.facebook.com/groups/hamiltonfalconwatch/). This year the group grew by over 2000 members, reaching more than 5200. About two thirds of our membership is from Hamilton and Burlington, with most of the rest being from other regions of Ontario and Canada. A couple of hundred members follow us from locations as far away as Europe and Australia.

The typical news report got about 2500 views. Some news posts, like hatching and banding, got up to 50,000 views which means they received significant attention from outside our group. Members of the group watch our website throughout the day and some will upload any interesting images that our cameras capture, often before the webmaster has had a chance to review the website archive and select/post recent photos. The group also serves as a resource for our community to ask informal questions and get answers on topics like peregrine biology and behaviour. The group, together with the website, provides a valuable resource for recruiting volunteers and seeking donations.

The Instagram account (@hamiltonfalconwatch on the Instagram app or from a web browser at https://www.instagram.com/hamiltonfalconwatch/?hl=en) had 633 followers at the end of the watch – a significant increase from last year. The best webcam photos are posted to the account.

C*ommercial Media Coverage*

i. CBC News Hamilton, Justin Chandler, 05.05.25
"Busy weekend at downtown nest as 4 peregrine falcon chicks hatch"
https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/hamilton-peregrine-chicks-hatched-2025-1.7526811

ii. CBC News Hamilton, Desmond Brown 30.06.25
"Hamilton peregrine falcon chick faces uncertain future after 2 'mishaps' in 9 days"
https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/peregrine-falcon-lawfield-1.7573852

iii. CBC Radio One, Toronto. Metro Morning, Haydn Watters roving reporter 11.06.25
Audio clip from Metro Morning after Haydn Watters spent a shift at the watch.
mm_june11_falconwatch.mp3

iv. Hamilton Spectator Online, Jeremy Kemeny, 05.05.25
"Four downtown Sheraton falcon chicks hatch — in record time"
https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/four-downtown-sheraton-falcon-chicks-hatch-in-record-time/article_879560ab-cdea-58c7-8958-610fd9d2b06a.html

v. Hamilton Spectator Online, Jeremy Kemeny, 05.07.25 and in print 04.07.25
"Falcon watch celebrates a busy, but successful season: 3 healthy chicks, 1 stuck in rehab" online
"Falcon watch ends with 3 healthy chicks, 1 in rehab" print

https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/falcon-watch-celebrates-a-busy-but-successful-season-3-healthy-chicks-1-stuck-in-rehab/article_41d41d85-3934-5d1d-a24d-7a0cd12e6218.html

vi. Hamilton Spectator, Jon Wells, 20.06.25

"Soaring good news: Rescued peregrine falcon chicks bounce back"
https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/soaring-good-news-rescued-peregrine-falcon-chicks-bounce-back/article_c214b528-8405-5d39-96e9-ee0c65543d58.html

vii. Hamilton Spectator, Jon Wells, 15.08.25

"Ivie-May saves the day, our falcon bounces back, and dog gets his due."
https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/the-best-news-ivie-may-saves-the-day-for-mom-our-falcon-bounces-back-and/article_7a10195f-d151-591d-8f82-3f654a0c95e5.html

viii. Hamilton Spectator, Joan Little, 08.05.25

"Federal Election delivers plenty of surprises"
https://www.thespec.com/opinion/columnists/federal-election-delivers-plenty-of-surprises/article_d00476ed-6e4a-544b-8336-80b8577dc494.html

ix. Hamilton Spectator, Joan Little, 22.05.25

"Burlington council remains too small"
https://www.thespec.com/opinion/columnists/burlington-council-size-remains-the-same-too-small/article_bbd6e6b5-875a-54a2-933b-268b8842b44b.html

x. Hamilton Spectator, Joan Little, 05.06.25

"Raptors, royalty, and rubber stamps"
https://www.thespec.com/opinion/columnists/raptors-royalty-and-rubber-stamps/article_07a0ba66-f6fa-5544-a2cf-18f2fa2bf327.html

xi. Hamilton Spectator, Joan Little, 19.06.25

"What does the future hold for our grandchildren?" Updated Aug 14: "We're living in scary times"
https://www.thespec.com/opinion/columnists/were-living-in-scary-times/article_ff28e895-920b-53fd-a606-84eefa6dcb96.html

xii. Hamilton Spectator, Joan Little, 03.07.25

"Does Doug Ford have an environmental compass?"
https://www.thespec.com/opinion/columnists/does-doug-ford-have-an-environmental-compass/article_057fa3f0-fd1d-5151-ae2b-06e19c00b725.html

xiii. Hamilton Spectator, Joan Little, 14.08.25

"A champion for Burlington"
https://www.thespec.com/opinion/columnists/a-champion-for-burlington/article_a81e5114-f46e-50e2-9e3b-7230de328be3.html

xiv. Field and Shutter Press, Greg Noakes, 06.05.25

"Hamilton Community Peregrine Project Celebrates "FOUR CHICKS IN HALF A DAY!""
https://www.fieldandshutterpress.ca/p/hamilton-community-peregrine-project

xv. CHCH-TV, Danielle De Graauw, 25.05.25

"Rare falcons nest again in downtown Hamilton"
https://www.chch.com/chch-news/rare-falcons-nest-again-in-downtown-hamilton/

xvi. CHCH-TV, Adam Atkinson, 12.06.25

"Hamilton's Peregrine Falcon chicks learning to fly has Falconwatch group on their toes"
https://www.chch.com/chch-news/hamiltons-peregrine-falcon-chicks-learning-to-fly-has-falconwatch-group-on-their-toes/

***xvii. Hamilton Naturalists' Club publication: The Wood Duck 2025* May:**

"31 years of Peregrine Falcons in Hamilton" p. 215 Mary Anne McDougall

Related Events

1. **Winona Public School:** Leah, Judy, and Jäger spoke to the Junior Kindergarten Class here on June 9th.
2. Their class project on the Falconwatch earlier in the school year inspired the naming of Winona, one of the female falcon chicks.
3. **Viola Desmond Elementary:** Leah led an event for the Kindergarten Class to the Jackson Square Plaza to speak about the Falconwatch on June 12th.
4. **Welcome Inn Community Centre:** Leah, Judy, and Jäger spoke at the Senior's Dinner Club here on June 17th.
5. **Alixandra Buck:** Visited the Falconwatch on June 20th and August 09th to shoot footage for a funding proposal video. Her goal is to shoot a full season Hamilton Falconwatch documentary in 2026.
6. **Interview with a Vampire:** On June 24th they shot an overnight shoot on the Jackson Square Plaza. They captured drone footage of the Standard Life Building but did not disturb the birds. Several of the chicks repeatedly flew to and from the Sheraton during the beginning of the shoot.
7. **Welcome Inn Children's Summer Camp:** On August 6th Judy & Jäger accompanied Leah to speak to the children.
8. **Falconwatch T-shirts:** Early this year Pat and Leah thought again about Falconwatch t-shirts. Matt suggested an artist, Paul Riss, and the four of us discussed options. Paul sent 3 designs and we decided to start with the one which has the Sheraton Hotel in the background. It proved popular and we were able to sell over 50. In addition to this year's design we will have a second design available next year.
9. **Velo-City Bird Pilsner:** On August 22nd Aquanova Brewing Company hosted a launch party to celebrate the release of their Velo-City Bird Pilsner (24 cases, 24 cans each) which featured a

Peregrine Falcon themed design on the can. The event was co-hosted by Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington and $1 from each can sold will be donated to Falconwatch. Judy Bailey brought Jäger to the event – he was much admired and photographed.

A BRIEF BIO OF THE 2025 PEREGRINE FALCON CHICKS

Four chicks were successfully banded on the 24th of May. It was determined that there were two males and two female chicks due to their size and weight.

Lawfield (male) was given a yellow band with the ID X/57. His USFW band number was given as 1947-52738. He weighed in at 695 grams and was aged 21 days old.

Winona (female) was given a red band with the ID H/85. Her USFW band number was given as 2187-06455. She weighed in at 889 grams and was aged 21 days old.

Charlton (male) was given a blue band with the ID X/58. His USFW band number was given as 1156-32718. He weighed in at 635 grams and was aged 21 days old.

Simcoe (female) was given a white band with the ID H/87. Her USFW band number was given as 1947-52740. She weighed in at 832 grams and was aged 21 days old.

There were five rescues over the course of the watch and three required medical evaluations at the Owl Foundation in Vineland, ON. The rescue details include:

RESCUE #1: LAWFIELD- On June 9th observers noticed that one of the chicks, Lawfield, was missing from the nest ledge. After several hours of searching he was located on the northeast corner of the Copps Coliseum roof. In the early evening he flew to the lower roof of the Thomson Building and then hopped to the Jackson Square plaza level where he was rescued and returned to the roof of the Sheraton at 8:40 PM.

RESCUE #2: LAWFIELD: On June 11thobservers noticed that Lawfield was once again missing again. Around 11:00 AM he was found low on the CIBC building near the MacNab transit terminal. He stayed there until 4:15 PM and then flew across King Street to the Sheraton Hotel. After another failed flight he ended up on the ground and was rescued. As a precaution he was taken to the Owl Foundation for medical evaluation, where there was some concern about his flying test so he remained an extra night. He was picked up and released on June 13th at 9:15 AM.

RESCUE #3: SIMCOE- On June 13th Simcoe tried to fly again early that morning and came to ground. She was rescued and taken out to the Owl Foundation for assessment and was released the following day.

RESCUE #4: WINONA- On June 14th Winona took her first set of flights. Around 8:50 PM she flew to the Thomson Building, then to the Art Gallery and finally toward Stelco Tower where she landed on the sidewalk along King Street. Volunteers rescued her in good health and returned her to the Sheraton Hotel roof after 10 PM.

RESCUE #5: LAWFIELD- On June 19th observers grew worried when Lawfield hadn't been seen. He was later found trapped and stressed in a small courtyard at the Hamilton Convention Centre, unable to fly out of this newly discovered space. After being rescued and taken to the Owl Foundation he was found to be dehydrated with a sore right shoulder. After reviewing earlier footage it was thought that some of these injuries may be from previous failed flights. On June 29th he was transferred to the National Wildlife Centre where a head tilt, a hairline fracture to his right wing and an eye injury were discovered. He was returned to the Owl Foundation and spent more than 7 weeks in care before being released on August 9th. A summary of his release may be found below under 'Watch Highlights'.

WATCH HIGHLIGHTS

Saturday May 3rd: all four chicks hatched within a 12 hour period.

Wednesday, May 15th: the four chicks were successfully banded and given their names as well as ID numbers.

Monday, June 2nd: the first day of Falconwatch watch begins. Volunteers and Coordinators arrive to monitor and track each of the birds and their daily habits and growth.

Friday, June 6th: the chicks begin to practice "helicoptering" - a manoeuver where the chicks flap and hover above the ledge to get used to the sensation of flying. All four have been up on the ledge have been seen running along the ledge and hopping while flapping. This is a sign that their first flights will happen very soon.

Monday June 9th: Lawfield was missing from the nest ledge when the volunteers arrived. He was located on the roof of the TD Coliseum (ex Copps Coliseum). First **observed** flight this year was by Lawfield later that day. He was returned to the Sheraton roof following a rescue.

Tuesday, June 10th: second flight by Lawfield who was rescued and returned to the Sheraton roof the following day after a check-up at the Owl Foundation.

Wednesday June 11th: first flights by Charlton and Simcoe.

Friday, June 13th: Simcoe is rescued and spends the night at the Owl Foundation.

Saturday, June 14th: Winona has her first flight. She is later rescued but is in good enough shape to be returned to the Sheraton roof.

Thursday, June 19th: Lawfield is rescued for the third time. Concerns about a head tilt, a sore shoulder and dehydration after examination at the Owl Foundation. Lawfield is taken at a later date to the National Wildlife Centre for further examination and then returned to the Owl Foundation where he remained for rehabilitation until August 09th.

Friday, June 20th: Simcoe and Winona were observed drinking from a puddle on the Standard Life rooftop—an unusual behavior for Peregrines, who usually get moisture from prey. However, our chicks have done this in past years. Shortly after the puddle Winona interacted with a small plant, possibly nibbling it or cleaning her beak, though the exact behavior is unclear and not previously observed. She did not appear to eat the plant.

Monday, June 23rd: the chicks are becoming even more confident in their flying skills. They spent the morning and evening showing off incredible feats of flight and talon touching as they learn the important skills required for hunting.

Sunday, June 29th: the final day of the watch where it was observed that the chicks were learning hunting skills such as how to catch prey while in the air. A few of the chicks were already dressing food. They were now covering more territory than was within the Falconwatch view, ranging even further afield. A warm 'Thank You' to everyone who came out and watched with us or assisted in any capacity this summer.

Saturday, August 9th: the successful release of Lawfield after 51 days at the Owl Foundation.

This exciting event was summarized by Leah Schwenger: "Lawfield is not only home, but he seems to be accepted by his parents! We arrived at the Braley Centre just before 9:00 AM. Matt, Paul Riss, our t-shirt designer, Alix Buck, who is hoping to get funding to produce a documentary on Falconwatch, Lawfield and I proceeded to the roof of the Sheraton. Pat went to Stelco Tower and Mary Anne was in the parking lot of the Braley building. On the roof, I opened the cage and had to shake it a bit for Lawfield to come out. Once he was out, he immediately took to the air and was gone! If you blinked you would have missed it! McKeever was sitting on the nest ledge and appeared rather blasé about it all. Judson shortly joined Lawfield in the air and we saw them circling the McMaster residence building. Lawfield came over the parking lot, but soon disappeared until Matt spotted him high, high up riding the thermals. Judson seemed to be the interested parent and was seen talon touching with Lawfield. Shortly after the crew in the parking lot observed Judson, McKeever and Lawfield go after and drive off a red tailed hawk over the Federal Building. Judson was seen to go gently after Lawfield a couple of times, but by no means tried to drive him off or hurt him. McKeever was on the Stelco Tower keeping her eye on things. We did not see the siblings."

COMPARISON TO PREVIOUS YEARS

This was the fourth consecutive year with Judson and McKeever as parents at the Sheraton. In both 2022 and 2023 they successfully fledged four healthy chicks! In 2024 four eggs were laid, 3 hatched and one chick perished of unknown causes in the nest scrape. Two chicks successfully fledged. In 2025 four eggs hatched, all within a 12 hour period on Saturday May 3rd, one week later than last year's chicks. This year three of the four chicks fledged successfully while the fourth, Lawfield, made an initial flight from the nest and two more flights before coming to ground and being rescued. After two more rescues Lawfield spent seven weeks at the Owl Foundation before he was successfully released back into the wild. The watch began on June 2nd and like the previous year there was anticipation of potentially higher winds downtown caused by continued development of tall buildings around the watch area. It is felt that these winds possibly caused one or more of the chicks to leave the ledge unexpectedly. The watch ended on Sunday, June 29th, four weeks after it began. There were five rescues required, more than any other year. Three of the four chicks, Charlton, Simcoe (one rescue) and Winona (one rescue) were eager to fly, eventually found their wings and became competent fliers. The fourth chick, Lawfield, was the first to leave the nest but required three rescues and was at the Owl Foundation for rehab due to his injuries until August 9th when he was released again on the Sheraton roof.

As with previous years there was great media coverage in commercial publications this year, including articles about Lawfield's situation. Due to four active chicks and a record number of rescues there continued to be calls for more volunteers especially during the second half of the watch. In 2023 the start of the watch began with very shaky first flights from the Peregrine chicks. It was a similar situation this year. In 2024 with only two chicks fledging successfully they were observed completing strong, long flights over downtown and even catching their own prey by the end of a shortened Falconwatch. This year the chicks favoured the Standard Life, the Stelco north face in the very hot days and the Thomson building very heavily in comparison to other years; spending most of their daytime moving between the three after they had left the nest. Other buildings favoured by the chicks were the McMaster building, the Regency and Bentley Place. It is interesting to note that the BDC and Pigott buildings were used heavily in the past but were not of great interest to this year's chicks. They preferred to go west which may be due to the weather or the changes in winds due to construction. The chicks seemed eager to fly, which led to some mishaps but eventually they made strong flights, barring Lawfield's mishap. They would spend much of their time in the last week of the watch beginning to practice hunting in downtown Hamilton.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Listed below are various recommendations for the future Falconwatch years:

- Location of adult peregrines (the parents) should be maintained as second priority when the chicks have begun to fly.
- The main goal of volunteers is to monitor the location and safety of the peregrines but we need to make sure that it is always an enjoyable experience - it should be noted that volunteers do not have to follow directions from other volunteers or anyone else other than the volunteer coordinators.

- Volunteer Orientation Session – less emphasis on rescue and more on what the general watch entails.
- Fundraising brainstorming committee meeting early in the year to maximize donations with contests etc.
- Ensure that rescue boxes **only** contain the required materials.
- Have a dedicated bag carrying radios, binders etc. to go with the rescue box left overnight at the Sheraton for the first shift.
- A safety procedure should be to return to base immediately if unsure of surroundings. Use the radio to convey that information and/call 911 if in danger.

CONCLUSION

Falconwatch 2025 was a definite success in four areas: the fledging of the four falcon chicks, the safety and enjoyment of the volunteers, widespread positive media representation and meaningful interaction with the public.

Without a doubt the major theme of the season was the number of successful rescues of Peregrine Falcon chicks in the downtown core. This is a testament to the dedication and professionalism of our volunteers. Lawfield's injuries serve as a reminder of the dangers of the urban environment. We are grateful that he recovered and successfully made strong flights upon his release August 9th.

In the spirit of innovation we tried new things in 2025. Foremost was the popularity of the Falconwatch t-shirt design by Paul Riss. Daily conversation with volunteers also produced a wealth of recommendations to better streamline and improve the watch in 2026.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people contribute to the success of Falconwatch each year. While we can't possibly acknowledge everyone some of the key players are listed below:

Hamilton Naturalists' Club: project management, volunteers, coordinators, video cameras.

Colin Watson (general manager), Ryan Iverson (Maintenance Manager) and the staff at the Sheraton Hotel for providing the room for banding, storing our rescue boxes overnight, roof access and for allowing us to store and charge our radios onsite.

Jennifer Atkinson, Samantha Hillgartner and the David Braley Health Sciences Centre staff and security for their ongoing support, storage facility and a room for the volunteer orientation.

To everyone involved in the banding of the chicks – a thank you for having to change to early Saturday, May 24th due to the forecast of rain on Thursday. The rain was vicious that day and climbing would have

been impossible! For the banding of the chicks: from the Friends of Canadian Peregrine Foundation (FOCPF) Cathy Kerr and Sally Williams for supplying the bands and assisting, Anne Yagi (retired from OMNR) for the banding. Jesse Pappin, our climber, and his colleague Mike Takeda for their climbing skills. Thanks also to the Sheraton for letting us use the mechanical room for the banding as the executive lounge was unavailable on the Saturday of the banding. The chicks were feisty at the banding and 21 days old with large talons.

The Owl Foundation for medical care for visits of Lawfield and Simcoe and especially for the extended stay of Lawfield from June 19th to August 9th.

Allison Drennan (Real Properties) and Stelco Tower security for overseeing our access to 20th floor; CIBC/RBC security for locating Lawfield.

Our volunteers who gave so much of their time to ensure the safety of our chicks. Many of our volunteers have been with us year after year. We are happy to report that we had several new volunteers and hope they will be available to help us out again next year.

Pat Baker, our Lead Monitor, for all of her organizational skills and for her relationship with the businesses that assist us.

Charles Gregory, our webmaster, for his dedication to the website and putting out numerous calls for volunteers and donations.

Leah Schwenger for communicating with volunteers and monitoring e-mails that came in through the website and helping to organize volunteer events.

Mary Anne McDougall for organizing TimeToSignUp, the online sign in for our volunteers to cover shifts and for her articles in the Wood Duck and North End Breezes.

Sandra Davey, Coordinator, Animal Care and Programs, Conservation Halton. For training our rescue team at Mountsberg Raptor Centre again this year.

Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington, through Sara Shwadchuck, 'The Peregrine Falcon My City Bird Hamilton' buttons. They will be distributed at the August picnic for volunteers. Also for initiating with Aquanova Brewery the Velo-City Pilsner.

Hamilton Public Library for streaming the website on the Big Screen at the Central library and for posting Falconwatch information to their Facebook and Instagram pages.

Paul Riss for the t-shirt designs and StartFamous for producing the t-shirts.

Sava Valemirovic, Construction manager at First Ontario Centre (now TD Coliseum), for contacting Pat Baker about Lawfield on the roof.

Otoa Productions Inc, Kris Gordon (location mgr.), for hiring extra staff to watch for the falcons during their nighttime filming with drones.

Judy Bailey, for bringing Jäger, her juvenile peregrine falcon to the 2024 volunteer picnic at Bayfront Park and for bringing him again this year. Also, for taking him to the Welcome Inn events and the Aquanova Brewery/Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington Velo-City Bird Pilsner launch.

Our climber Jesse Pappin and his colleague Mike Takeda for visiting the nest ledge in November 2024 to remove a rapidly growing weed shrub and the remains of Westdale's carcass (2024 chick).