

Environmental Officials Band Peregrine Falcons in Boston

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BOSTON - May 23, 2011 - State wildlife officials today banded four three-week-old peregrine falcon chicks hatched this spring atop the Marriott's Custom House - the Commonwealth's most productive falcon nesting site. Each year staff from the Department of Fish and Game's (DFG) Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) visits the site, which has hosted falcon nests since 1987.

As of 2010, 70 peregrine falcon chicks were banded at the Custom House. These birds have subsequently been found nesting in areas as nearby as Quincy and as far away as New York City.

Peregrine falcons are the focus of a banding effort by MassWildlife biologists who visit nesting sites in May and June to band and record the total number of young peregrine falcons hatched each year.

Banding of the young has proven to be an important scientific tool for measuring the success of restoration programs, raptor survival rates, dispersal distances, habitat preferences and causes of death.

"This research informs and educates us about the habits of these amazing creatures, which have thrived here in recent years," said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Richard K. Sullivan Jr. "The Massachusetts peregrine falcon's restoration story is an inspiring one, and success is due in large part to the hard work of Department of Fish and Game staff."

Classified as endangered under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA), peregrine falcons disappeared from the Commonwealth in 1955 due to the exposure to the pesticide DDT.

With the banning of DDT in 1972 and subsequent restoration efforts, the peregrine falcon has made a comeback both here in Massachusetts and across the country and, while still listed as endangered under MESA, the species was removed from the federal endangered species list in 1999.

In 1987, MassWildlife's restoration program led to the first nesting in Massachusetts in over 30 years. In 2002, there were six breeding pairs and today the falcon population in Massachusetts is above its pre-DDT status with 20 nesting pairs. Historically, there were 14 known cliff nesting sites in Massachusetts.

Nesting sites have been reported in Cambridge, Springfield, Deerfield, Amherst, Holyoke, Lawrence, Fall River, New Bedford, Saugus, Swampscott, Lowell, Worcester, and Bourne.

"I'm proud of our efforts to protect these birds with help and partnership of organizations like the Marriot Corporation. Our joint efforts ensure that falcons will continue to flourish here for generations to come," said DFG Commissioner Mary Griffin.

Also assisting in the banding of the falcon chicks - two males, two females - was Norman Smith, director of the Mass Audubon Society's Blue Hills Trailside Museum.

Peregrine falcons are the fastest birds on earth - capable of diving at speeds up to 200 miles per hour. They prefer to nest on cliffs or man-made structures overlooking bodies of water, and are among the most widely distributed bird species in the world, inhabiting every continent except Antarctica. For more information about peregrine falcons, visit <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/nhosp/species-and-conservation/nhfacts/falco-peregrinus.pdf>  .