

Christ Church Peregrines 2015

A review of the first five years (2010-2014) of the Peregrines at Christ Church (North Cotswold Ornithological Society website at <http://ncosbirds.org.uk>) has been written despite the thought that



this action may risk the end of this remarkable run. But once again, in 2015, the Christ Church Peregrines have done us proud.

Firstly I had to clean up the nest box and gravel early in January. On the tower floor was the head of a male Teal – a species we have found before but this time it was in excellent condition.

The first egg was laid at 16.22 GMT on March 31 after the female had gone in and out of the box many times during the day and often remaining standing up and concentrating hard.

On April 2 there was only one egg at 19.06 and after this it was too dark to see the CCTV picture. On the 3rd at 5.21 when it was just light, the female got up and there were two eggs. Clearly the second egg had been laid overnight.

On April 5 there were two eggs at 7.25 and three eggs at 7.28 so the third egg was laid during those few minutes.

On April 7 the fourth egg was seen to drop at 17.39.26. The last egg is much whiter (but with dark red blotches) than the brick red of the other eggs. This is usual for this pair of Peregrines.



The CCTV view of the laying of the fourth egg can be seen on the YouTube link;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITN55Tc23_8&list=PLTM1gWldEpiJuwQUfrdN3iNTIDmZNtjYX&index=4

The female starts calling soon after the egg has dropped and peers up at the male on one of the church pinnacles in triumph and is an action I have not seen before.

The male and female exchange incubation duties several times a day and here is a typical changeover. The male gets off the four eggs; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xx16wfv28NE>

The female starts her stint a minute later; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SlkqxJf4liM>



A photo of the four eggs is shown and also the female fussing with them before an incubation turn.

Hatching of the Chicks

The first chick emerged on the morning of May 9 and a chipped second egg was present in the middle of the afternoon. The second chick was out of its shell in the evening and the first chick was begging for food. There were three chicks at midday the next day and on the morning of the 11th the fourth chick struggled free from the egg. For the fourth year in succession four eggs. Excellent!

The CCTV on the May 11 at 7am shows the fourth chick wet and feeble compared with the others;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6R6JnbCPTS8&index=5&list=PLTM1gWldEpiJuwQUfrdN3iNTIDmZNtjYX>

The female is looking after them very well as usual and the male brings in food on demand. On the 12th at midday all four chicks are fed and can be seen here;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvMoXd9E0F0&index=6&list=PLTM1gWldEpiJuwQUfrdN3iNTIDmZNtjYX>



The following link shows a clip of the male bringing in a prey item when the chicks are a bit older. The CCTV recording jumps a bit at first but recovers;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tjJVAKlaLo&feature=youtu.be>

After twenty minutes of vigorous feeding the pace is reduced and soon after the following clip ends the chicks did not accept any more food despite several attempts by the male adult;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zU8kc5x4FY&feature=youtu.be>

Ringling of the Young

The chicks were rung on June 3 after 4 weeks. This was later compared with previous years and they were all out of the nest box but did not try and run away!

Each chick weighed about 900 grams which with other measurements suggests they were all females.

While the ringing by Rob Husbands and Anna Field (ably assisted by Natalie Wylde) progressed, I searched for recognisable prey. I was not pleased to find a Kingfisher! I am unclear how a Kingfisher is caught by a Peregrine. The latter likes to take birds in flight. Kingfishers are usually flying low to the water and in enclosed spaces like meandering streams. However, we have a pair of Kingfishers nearby at the lake at Pittville Park. According to John Sanders, the juveniles disappeared on about June 1, but the two adults remained. Although we cannot prove that the dead bird was from Pittville Park, it does seem likely.



The Chicks are Growing

The following clip shows all four chicks being fed in the nest box on June 12;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdVzo0Fi18c&index=9&list=PLTM1gWldEpiJuwQUfrdN3iNTIDmZNtjYX>

and here, three chicks are being fed on the nest box roof on June 20;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0FbJSgQs84&list=PLTM1gWldEpiJuwQUfrdN3iNTIDmZNtjYX&index=10>

Here two juveniles are trying to eat the same piece of prey;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKZehGb59OM&index=11&list=PLTM1gWldEpiJuwQUfrdN3iNTIDmZNtjYX>

First Flights

The first juvenile flew on June 22 on a windy day but appeared to be stuck halfway down a face of the church in the evening. Early the following morning I hurried to the church worried that the bird might have become stranded on the ground. In fact it was on top of a pinnacle so it must have managed to fly up. It was mobbed by Lesser Blacked-backed Gulls while the adults watched in rather a relaxed fashion. The juvenile then flew down to the floor of the tower and ate some prey vigorously while the other juveniles present were disinterested. A little later that day all four juveniles were happily sleeping together:

By June 26 all juveniles were flying and could be seen distributed over the church. The photo by Bob Telford shows the underwing pattern of a juvenile Peregrine.

This year I did not have to capture any grounded juveniles and carry them back to the top to (hopefully) wait a few days before trying again.



The juveniles clearly like the company of their siblings as shown in the following clip where two preen each other and nibble bills on July 8;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sS-uG5SqaCA&list=PLTM1gWldEpiJuwQUfrdN3iNTIDmZNtjYX&index=12>

At this age they often cosy up together but change their allegiances periodically.

Growing Up

There are usually one or more juveniles present on the church – on the pinnacles or stone work. On July 28 and August 4 all four were present together on the tower floor. The birds were tucking into prey (with a few squabbles). After a while they became rather full and had to have increasing periods of recovery while they digested some of it before they could carry on eating. When they can eat no more they close their eyes and often begin whining for more – sometimes looking up at their parents. I believe the sight of the adults stimulates this response even if they are full up. There may be another reason for the whining - maybe to discourage the adult flying down and eating the prey. The adult may deliver prey to a juvenile which then looks up at the adult and whines for ten minutes before eventually starting eating. When prey is left, even with the juvenile present, the adult may swoop down and eat the remains so maybe the juvenile's action is sensible.



When a juvenile knows she can eat no more, she will sometimes look round for a place to hide the remains. About the only place is behind the nest box although the gutter is also used.

Here is a photo of one of the juveniles tucking in. All look the same because they are all females this year.

Sometimes they are rather inquisitive and look into the holes that I look out from. The photo below is full frame!

On Aug 4 all four were on the tower floor and the last time I saw a juvenile feeding was on September

16th. There was an interesting interaction between the adults on October 14th. The female was eating prey on top of the cabin in which I sometimes stand. She had been eating for 20 minutes or so then stopped and looked around. The male came in and ate a few bits and pieces. Note the difference in size between the male and female. He then grabbed the prey from the female and a bit of a tussle ensued. He flew away with the prey. Fortunately the female did not seem particularly bothered and I still look forward to next spring and another clutch of eggs!

<https://youtu.be/55am8-BiPyo>

It has become increasingly clear that the movement of the camera can be heard by the juveniles. It also sometimes continues to move until it is instructed to move the other way! The male adult was eating prey on the floor and I moved the camera which he immediately looked at and took off in fright. The juveniles are not so timid and just look sometimes and then carry on eating. For a period of time the camera would not move at all. I must remember to try and move it at least once a week. Possibly we will need to replace it soon.

The Clean-up

On September 8 I cleaned up the tower which as usual was covered with prey remains. This was earlier than usual this year so that engineers and the architects could discuss how they were going to mend a crack in a wall. The female adult circled round followed by a juvenile which appeared to be trying to catch up. The juvenile appeared to be slightly smaller and slimmer and had to beat its wings faster to keep up. The only recognisable prey was a Great Spotted Woodpecker which I had seen being eaten earlier in the year. The juvenile reappeared to eat prey three hours after we left and the adult female flew off with the prey later so they were not unduly worried by our presence on the tower for several hours.



The Progress of Peregrines Raised at Christ Church in Earlier Years

In 2014 a male (CR) from the 2010 brood at Christ Church was seen at Tewkesbury Abbey during September 2014 with a female (DX) from the Avon Gorge. Disappointingly, DX spent December to May away from the Abbey and on a Church at Bishops Cleeve. Fortunately, CR at the Abbey paired with another female which was not ringed. However, they did not meet up until the end of April 2015 and although they both visited the nesting tray together and made scrapes in the gravel it appeared to be too late to lay eggs. Oh well – perhaps in 2016!

A female from the 2010 brood has been successful in Stafford with three young in 2015 and probably also four young in 2014. From the 2012 brood, a male paired with a female in Kidderminster but they were unsuccessful. However, a female from the 2012 brood raised four young in Walsall. Surely someone will find young from the 2011 and 2013 brood somewhere in the UK soon! And we now have four more to add to the previous 19 birds fledged – 22 in total!

The following table updates progress of fledged young from previous years.

Bird	Sex	Year	Town	Comment
CR	Male	2010	Tewkesbury Abbey	With DX (Avon Gorge) on September 25th 2014. DX roosted at night on St Michael's Church at Bishops Cleeve near Cheltenham at the end of December to end of May 2015 although she was seen with CR at Tewkesbury Abbey on March 17 (but DX had a damaged claw). DX was seen back at Bishops Cleeve on May 15th and CR at Tewkesbury Abbey was with a new female without a ring at the end of April. Both CR and the new female were present and interacting to the middle of September 2015 and the female to the end of the year (at least). See http://www.abbeyperegrines.blogspot.co.uk
JP	Male	2012	Kidderminster, chimney at Weavers Wharf Retail Park	Failed breeding attempt; possibly even before the egg stage but both birds still present. Next year perhaps.
JN	Female	2012	Walsall Town Hall	After 5 unsuccessful years the female which had been present died in 2014. JN is believed to be a new female which had moved in and four chicks were raised in 2015.
CZ	Female	2010	Stafford	Four chicks in the first year 2014 at this site. In 2015 a photo showed CZ and 3 chicks fledged (probably CZ was also the female in 2014).

The review of the first five years of Peregrines at Christ Church can be found on the North Cotswold Ornithological Society website at <http://ncosbirds.org.uk>

There is a selection of photos on Flickr taken from the top of Christ Church for each of the years 2010 to 2015. To view them; open the link to Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/55200709@N07/sets>

Click on first photo of the album you wish to look at e.g. Peregrine2015 then you can look through the collection by clicking on > which appears on the right side.

The progress of the birds at Tewkesbury Abbey can be found at <http://www.abbeyperegrines.blogspot.co.uk/>. Many thanks to David Bagley for the information from this site and fingers crossed for 2016.

Many thanks to the staff at Christ Church who have been very helpful throughout the six years. In particular, without the interest from Martin Chapman this project would have been very difficult. Ed Drewitt who has written the book "Urban Peregrines" has also provided much encouragement.

Dave Pearce