The Peregrine Falcons Are Back

If you are a bird watcher or simply enjoy seeing the recovery of a once endangered species (due to DDT and other pesticide use), it is exciting to see the return of Peregrine Falcons to Charleston Lake.

From 2001 to 2005, the Charleston Lake Association & Charleston Lake Environmental Association were involved in a joint venture with the Canadian Peregrine Foundation, the Leeds County Stewardship Council and the Ministry of Natural Resources to see if falcons would once again start to nest somewhere in our area. During that period, 18 falcons were released from the hatch box erected by the stewardship council high atop Rube’s Rocks. This was a first for a project on private lands (the Hollingsworth property) in the wild.

The chicks were approximately three weeks old on arrival and were hand fed frozen quail daily by stewardship volunteers led by Dwayne Struthers. This involved microwaving the quail breast, driving several kilometres over rough terrain and then feeding through the back of the hack box with a glove to ensure the chicks did not imprint on a human. Power was run to the site so that the chicks could be seen live on the internet. The chicks were then released when they were between 38-43 days old with food still being provided until they were hunting successfully on their own.

The first chicks were named Ruby (after her nesting site name), Athena (after Athens of course) and Charles after Charleston Lake. The term Peregrine has roots with ‘wanderer’ or ‘pilgrim’ as these birds have been known to travel thousands of kilometres. Ruby was fitted with a transmitter in order to track her migration. Instead of flying south, she spent her first winter on the coast of Long Island, New York. She returned to the Trenton air base in April and was captured by a falconer doing bird control. The battery transmitter was removed and she was released on the cliffs at Landon Bay. Peregrines have nested at Landon Bay for approximately the last five years but it is not confirmed if these falcons were banded.

On July first of this year, a pair of adult falcons were seen on Old Baldy and they stayed there until late August. No chicks were seen during that time. This year, Rick Wilson was one of the first to spot the falcons on the Old Baldy cliff and he was able to capture some great images of three chicks from just after they hatched to when they made their first flights. Over the summer, lake residents and visitors have had the unique opportunity to see these swift and beautiful birds perched on the cliff or performing their spectacular aerobatics while chasing each other.

For further information go to [www.peregrine-foundation.ca](http://www.peregrine-foundation.ca) and click on Peregrine releases for Leeds County for the daily sightings and antics by both the birds and the lake volunteers who made this possible.

The positive outcome of this fascinating project is an example of what can be done when volunteers work creatively and collaboratively with various public agencies and private partners to ensure we preserve and enhance Charleston Lake and the beautiful natural environment where we live.