



# *Peregrines Grace* Lincoln Cathedral

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**Photographs:** Andrew Chick and  
Lincoln Cathedral

Historically the peregrine falcon has been a rare winter visitor to Lincolnshire. They were traditionally recorded on the coast chiefly in the winter months between October and November. These birds were likely to be migrant birds from North Scandinavia or Central Europe, taking refuge from a hard European winter. Within the UK, the peregrines strongholds were always in Scotland, Northern England and Wales, where birds breed in upland areas and rocky sea cliffs. So, if you live in Lincolnshire and wanted to see one of these spectacular birds of prey it meant a long trek across the country or long hours on a freezing Lincolnshire salt marsh hoping for a quick glimpse!

So why were peregrines such a rare bird? Unfortunately peregrines have suffered a history of persecution, throughout the UK and Lincolnshire. One bird, which was tagged in the Vesteraalan Islands, North Norway, came to an unfortunate end in December 1943, just outside Sleaford. Continued persecution meant peregrine populations in the UK reached an all time population low in the mid 60s, helped somewhat by the widespread use of organochlorine insecticides (DDT). So it wasn't until the early 1970s that the peregrine population in the UK began to recover – fuelled by new understanding of the effect of chemicals in the food chain and by the very public plight of the peregrines problems calling for much needed protection and conservation.

Thankfully the peregrine recovery has never really looked back from the dark days of the 1970s, and the slow spread of peregrine out of their former strong holds has meant that in more recent years the birds haven't been as rare a visitor to Lincolnshire. Initially this meant more birds being observed on the coast, but slowly they started appearing inland and in the mid 1990s a single bird was observed on a regular basis on and around Lincoln Cathedral. Standing at the base of the cathedral, looking up at the beautiful stonework towering above you it's not difficult to see what attracts a peregrine to this magnificent structure. To a peregrine the cathedral towers with their constant up-draughts and commanding panoramic

views must seem similar to its more conventional sea cliff home!

Looking for peregrine in the mid 1990s at Lincoln Cathedral was a bit of a hit and miss affair, with birds often wandering long distances and going missing for days. However, by 2000 a single bird was becoming far more site faithful and far more reliable when it came to observation. In 2004 a nest box was installed on the south side of the central tower of the cathedral to try to encourage the birds to nest. The nest box is in fact more like a large wooden ledge, with an all important lip to stop the young birds falling out!

In 2007 the peregrines bred for the first time at Lincoln Cathedral and they had three chicks, although they did not use the nesting box so thoughtfully provided for them! There was always the concern that the young birds would be in danger of falling out and on 21st June 2007 this is exactly what did happen. However, after a night in a local wildlife rescue centre the single stranded chick was returned to the cathedral and placed back on the tower, no worse for wear for its little adventure.

On 21st June 2007 the first of the three Peregrine chick's took to the air, soaring majestically over the towers of Lincoln Cathedral. A truly historic event in the life of Lincoln Cathedral and a milestone in Lincolnshire ornithology. Over the next few days all three chicks were seen soaring over the cathedral and some lucky observers saw both the adults and immature birds in the air at the same time.

The adult birds were seen less frequently after the chicks had fledged, as they were being kept very busy finding a constant supply of food for the three hungry immature birds waiting on the tower. The immature birds are likely to eventually disperse, so the first few weeks after fledging were the best time to see them. The birds, were best observed by standing on the south side of the Main Tower, and waiting for the immature birds to soar past. They are easily identified with their long broad wings and relatively short tail. The immature birds are browner and less well marked than the adult birds. The adult birds have clean white breasts and well marked black 'moustache' that con-

trasts with their white faces. Other birds to look out for while waiting for the peregrines are jackdaws, swifts and feral rock doves - which all nest on the cathedral.

As part of the RSPB's 'Aren't birds Brilliant' campaign, a manned watch point was set up in the cathedral's Chapter House which proved a very suc-

cessful draw for visitors. Up to four telescopes were trained on the birds and their every move was watched and explained by a team of experts. So all fingers are crossed and we all wait in anticipation that the birds will return in 2008 and raise another brood; Lincoln's next generation of peregrine falcons.



## Wragby Wildlife

Chambers Farm Wood in Wragby has become a hive of activity in recent weeks. The Forestry Commission is working with offender teams from the Lincolnshire Probation Area to clear a woodland pond, which has become badly choked with weeds and debris.

Left to stew, nitrates from rotting vegetation would harm the water quality, deterring wildlife. But now, the hope is that the frogs, fowl and insects will be lured back to the watery habitat in greater numbers.

The project is being undertaken as part of the link-up between the probation service and forest chiefs, which this year celebrates its tenth anniversary.

Richard Wright, Placement Manager with the Probation Service, said:

"We get a wide variety of people with differing skills and abilities completing community orders in the woods. They range from eighteen-year-olds who have hardly spent a day in the countryside, to older white-collar professionals. For many it is a massive eye-opener. The work can be hard graft at times. But for some it sparks a real interest in the environment. Many have gone onto volunteer with conservation groups, richer and wiser for the experience."

*Below: Richard Wright hands over a plaque to forester Wally Grice, to mark the latest pond clearance project in Chambers Farm Wood, undertaken by local offenders (pictured in the background)*

