

*Mission:**Building upon the successful recovery of the California Peregrine Falcon population*

- To inspire students and adults to conserve nature, and,
- To involve them in meaningful activities including fledge watch, nest monitoring, and other appropriate citizen science opportunities.

PEREGRINE PROFILE: SUZANNE LANGRIDGE

The first job Dr. Suzanne Langridge got after earning her bachelor of science degree, was working at an SCPBRG Peregrine Falcon release site at Mount Lassen in 1992. She said, "I was lucky to be assigned to work in such a beautiful National Forest. Over the summer, we released and observed nine falcons. It was exciting to be a part of such positive work."

"The release box was located on the edge of a cliff overlooking Mountain Meadows Reservoir. My partner and I would walk down the rocky cliff in the early morning to feed the falcons, and then sit at the top of the cliff taking notes on their behavior, or track them using radio telemetry. It was an amazing experience. I taught myself the natural history of the area, learned to find my way through the forest to alpine lakes, and became more in tune with the changing natural cycles.

For example, I distinctly remember experiencing three full moons during my stay that were so bright that I was able to make my way without a flashlight."

The Peregrine release experience also had an impact on Suzanne's parents when they came to visit. "My mom, who had owned a dance company for more than 20 years, returned to school in forestry at OSU and then earned a Ph.D. in Environmental Studies at Berkeley. Now she teaches Environmental law and policy at UCSC."

In addition to recovering a species near extinction, the Peregrine Falcon work at UC Santa Cruz inspired many to pursue important conservation biology work. Today, Suzanne teaches restoration ecology, and, animal ecology and conservation, for the UC Santa Cruz Environmental Studies Department. She credits

her Mt. Lassen experience as important to her decision to return to school and earn a Ph.D.



Dr. Suzanne Langridge teaches "Restoration Ecology" at UC Santa Cruz. (Glenn Stewart photo)

SANTA CRUZ Predatory Bird Research Group

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SANTA CRUZ

FALL, 2009

The Peregrine Falcon—
From near extinction to full recovery

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



John Schmitt and Merlyn Felton atop Morro Rock in 1978. (Glenn Stewart photo)

When I snapped this photo of John Schmitt and Merlyn Felton (pointing) atop Morro Rock in the early spring of 1978, the future of the Peregrine Falcon was uncertain at best. None were left breeding east of the Mississippi River and just two nesting pairs were found during a recent survey of California.

John and Merlyn were the lead field biologists for the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group at the time. Merlyn had spent the prior spring (1977) observing a nesting pair of Peregrines from his little blind. His toothpaste still stained the rock where he had been hunkered down. Sadly, the male disappeared part way through the nesting season.

When we reached the top of the Rock at dawn on that overcast February morning, Merlyn took a few moments to describe some of the male's hunting flights before he went missing. From his observation post near the eyrie, Merlyn was able to follow the tiercel's flights as he sped across the water toward the coast

with the afternoon sun at his back to snatch shorebirds and doves from the air. It was easy for John and me to imagine the thrill of his observations as we took in a panorama that included a large pod of passing Dall's Porpoise as the sun came up over San Luis Obispo on that beautiful morning.

On a recent return trip to the summit of Morro Rock, two pairs of Peregrine Falcons occupied nest sites on opposite flanks of Morro Rock. And, scores of Brown Pelicans—also absent in 1978—circled us on its peak.

August is shaping up as a good month to celebrate the extraordinary conservation accomplishment of the Peregrine recovery. This August 5th, the California Fish and Game Commission completed its two-year review of a petition, and then acted to remove the Peregrine from the California Endangered Species List. Ten years ago on August 20, 1999, Peregrine Falcons were taken off the federal endangered species list.

To commemorate the ten-year anniversary, The Peregrine Fund hosted a celebration at its World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho. I was pleased to attend and represent UC Santa Cruz's contributions to this remarkable recovery story, and to honor our friend, Nick Dunlop, who was selected for an impressive exhibit of his wild Peregrine Falcon photography at the event.

— Glenn R. Stewart

AN EMPHASIS ON SCHOOLS

Teaching young students with a focus on 5th to 8th graders, has been a backbone of our program for more than a decade. Teachers like Ron Lee, tell us:

“The presentation is valuable to my science classes at John Muir Middle School because of the awareness it creates about how environmental factors affect all living things. It creates a point of dialogue from which I can springboard into other topics.”

The combination of a tame and relaxed falcon plus an assembly presentation about scientists who have been successful restoring species that were near the brink of extinction, is inspirational to students. Our program is not merely “about birds” or, “about scientists,” but about real experiences and career paths that have made a difference to the conservation of nature.

During the past decade, an average of 43 presentations per year have been made to a total audience of 58,203 students and members of the community. For many, it is their first contact with an iconic species of wildlife. (Teachers have commented that some of their students have never seen a live cow!)

This experience, coupled with a wildlife biologist's message rooted in decades of fieldwork, is a turning point for some students as they make decisions about future courses of study. At the very least, our assemblies serve as a foundation for future thinking about the protection of wildlife and nature.

To schedule an assembly see our website — www.scpbrg.org.



FALCON FINDER

Medical researcher, Mary Malec, is developing a reputation. A long-time downtown San Francisco falcon-watcher, she has identified more banded Peregrine Falcons by finding them and reading their bands through a spotting scope than any other person since Peregrine Falcon population recovery work was completed more than a decade ago.

Notably, she has seen all three of the 2007 San Jose City Hall fledglings along the Berkeley to Alameda bayside corridor. Most recently, she spied "Hiko" near the border of Oakland and Alameda.

But the big news is that Mary confirmed that "Esperanza" nested successfully at an inaccessible East Bay industrial site fledging at least two young. Nesting by this 2007 San Jose City Hall fledgling marks a new generation of Bay Area urban falcons!

Another one of Mary's interesting finds was a male (tiercel) falcon nesting on Mount Diablo. This thirteen-year-old falcon was taken from a precarious nest on a Southern California bridge as a baby in 1996. Bridges provide good nesting habitat that is inaccessible to predators. Bridges also offer hunting perches that command a wide airspace. But they are lethal fledging environments for young peregrines. Limited perches beneath bridges and windy conditions mean that the clumsy young birds often drown or are killed by traffic when left to fledge on their own.

The Mount Diablo tiercel made his way from a Santa Barbara County release site to the nest ledge where Mary confirmed his presence for the first time in 2008! This bird, like many others, was moved to safety by SCPBRG biologists. Student biologists took over from there



and monitored his transition to wild independence following the same protocol that was used for young peregrines during population management and recovery work.

This fall, Mary will present her report on a year of almost weekly observations at a remote Bay Area Peregrine Falcon territory at the annual conference of Western Field Ornithologists in Boise, Idaho.

We are certainly happy to know that our released birds go on to a productive future, and we are grateful to Mary Malec for helping to prove it!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

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76 PEOPLE VOLUNTEER FOR FLEDGE-WATCH



Stefanie Arthur (left) and Ann Greiner participate in "Fledge Watch" in downtown San Francisco. (Stefanie Arthur photo)

For the first time in its thirty-four year history, SCPBRG taught "Fledge Watch" classes to community members. Falcon Nest Camera viewers wanting a tangible volunteer role while experiencing life inside of a Peregrine Falcon territory attended one of five evening and weekend classes offered in San Jose and San Francisco.

About 200 people attended with most at the San Jose locations thanks to the fabulous help of the San Jose Peregrine Falcon Association. Seventy-six class members signed University of California volunteer forms qualifying them for the opportunity to staff one or more of the scheduled shifts.

During the classes, fledge watch members learned about falcon nesting chronology and the fledging behavior of young Peregrine Falcons. They learned to apply the same observation protocol that SCPBRG staff members used for decades to interpret the status of nest sites across California during the population recovery work.

The approximately five-hour shifts (dawn until ten, ten until three, and, three until dark) were staffed during all daylight hours in San Jose and San Francisco during the period when the young falcons were between 38 days and 50 days of age. Participants observed the nest ledge closely to be sure that fledglings made their initial flights to safe destinations.

In addition to watching for fledging, most volunteers were able to witness at least one hunting flight by the adult falcons. Comments such as, "Does it get any better than this?" were heard repeatedly as falcons raced out from San Jose City Hall or the Pacific Gas and Electric Company headquarters to stoop at a pigeon or other bird in the downtown airspaces. Most reported that it was a thrilling wildlife experience that they hope to repeat next year.

KEEN OBSERVER

In the interest of protecting the location of these birds, we will refer to this by the fictitious name, "Tina's nest." Living on a street lined by mature sycamore trees, "Tina" began to regularly see Cooper's hawks in her neighborhood and soon discovered a nest high in one of the sycamore trees across the street from her front door!

We should probably add that "Tina" is a fledge watch participant. She has become a keen observer of Peregrine Falcons in downtown San Jose during the past three years and as a result, has a heightened awareness of raptors. So imagine her delight at having a young Cooper's hawk fly within twenty feet of her while reading a book on her patio, or seeing one bathe in her backyard bird bath.

In one report to us she described her excitement after identifying the quiet, whistling cries of the juveniles as she stalked them along the sidewalk... "The cries I heard the other evening that I had not noted previously were hunger wails. It was very evident and very clear. And, it was very amusing. As I watched, I had my camera ready on its tripod. A few folks were curious about what I was watching. One couple was across the street from me walking their two dogs when they stopped to search the trees for what I was peering at with my binoculars and camera. I told them there were Cooper's Hawks up there. They both looked at me as if they were shocked that I could speak, and hurried on their way. The human animal is the most bizarre creature I'll ever encounter, I am sure of it."

"Tina's" story is not unique. A surprising number of falcon nest camera watchers wrote to report the presence of nesting Cooper's hawks in their neighborhoods. We are pleased to know that the birds are doing well, but even happier to see that an interest in Peregrine Falcon nesting translates into a broader awareness of raptors and other birds.



A Cooper's hawk parenting recently fledged young in a San Jose neighborhood. (contributed)