

# THE PEREGRINE FALCONS OF ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS CHURCH, MOUNT DINHAM, EXETER

## 2. PEREGRINES IN EXETER

Peregrines have been associated with St. Michael and All Angels Church, Mount Dinham, in Exeter since 1988, when an adult male first took up residence. It was joined in 1989 by a female and the birds were often seen perching by day, returning with prey and roosting by night.

A nest box was erected the following winter by Nick P Williams with the charity 'Devon Birds' in the hope they would breed there. This did not occur and there was only sporadic occupation by single birds over the next six years, until the spring of 1997 when a pair appeared again.

During the previous winter, a pair of Ravens had built a stick nest on the east-facing ledge at the base of the church's spire, about 30 meters above ground level. The falcons took over the Ravens' nest and reared three young. This was the first record of Peregrine nesting on a building in Devon, and the first Church used in the U.K. following their recovery from the population crash.



The Raven nest fell apart during essential works to the lightning conductor the following winter, and was successfully replaced with a shallow tray by 'Devon Birds'. There have been changes of both female and male Peregrines since 1997 but there has always been a pair present all year, and they can usually be seen perching on the various pinnacles by day, unless they are off hunting.

Exeter has many different and rich habitats in close proximity, over which the Peregrines hunt and catch a wide variety of prey species, but the majority are medium size birds, such as pigeons, starlings and waders.

Peregrines normally lay up to 4 eggs from mid march, close to the Spring Equinox, at about two day intervals, which hatch after 32 days incubation. The young falcons fly after 6 weeks, and will stay with their parents until late summer, when they become independent and can fend for themselves.

In 2001, a camera was installed by Luke Sanger of Eco Watch to film the birds on the east-facing nest ledge, with access for all to watch the developments on the World Wide Web. This was in operation until 2008, when the Peregrines then took to the original nest box inside the spire itself, erected in 1989. They have used this nest site to date and have reared a total of 51 young (See table).

Following the church's successful Heritage Lottery Funding application in 2012, Wildlife Windows installed a new nest camera pointing inside the original internal nest box. With the recent installation of Broadband and generous sponsorship from 'Devon Birds' in 2014, it is now again possible to observe eggs being laid through to fledging of the young Peregrines.