Urban hunters flying at 200 mph.

UTAH IS HOME to an abundance of amazing wildlife, but there's something extra special flying fast through the heart of Salt Lake City. If you're downtown, look up and you just might catch a glimpse of the predatory peregrine falcon.

City dwellers

Peregrines falcons have enjoyed the urban lifestyle in downtown Salt Lake for more than 30 years. In the spring, the falcons spend most of their time in nesting boxes found high atop buildings near South Temple and Main Street. This is where they incubate their eggs and carefor their little ones.

> ***"Removed from the Endangered Species List in 1999, peregrine falcons now thrive across the United States."***

Historically, the falcons used a nestbox on the Jospeh Smith Memorial Building. After a three-year nesting hiatus, we're happy to see the falcons have once again chosen to nest downtown — this time on the One Utah Center skyscraper. To watch the falcons and their daily shenanigans (via Boyer web cams), visit ***wildlife.utah.gov/peregrine.***

Food on the fly

When the falcons aren't in their nestbox, they're probably soaring high above the city looking to snag a meal. These extraordinary hunters feast almost exclusively on birds caught in mid-air.

A peregrine falcon can reach speeds up to 200 miles per hour during vertical dives, making them one of the world's fastest animals. The pigeon population of Salt Lake is enough to keep the falcons full, but dozens of other bird species fall prey to these magnificent flyers.

Nesting and fledging timeline

Every year, a family drama plays out in the nestbox as the Salt Lake City peregrines lay eggs, hatch baby falcons (called eyases) and teach their young to fly. Once the webcams are activated in early April, here's what you can expect to see:

- **Early April** — The female falcon lays three to four eggs over a period of six to eight days.
- **April to mid-May** — The male and female take turns hunting and incubating the eggs.
- **Mid-May** — The eggs hatch over the course of about a week.
- **Mid-May to late June** — The parents feed and care for the young falcons, who transform from awkward fluffballs to large birds with flight feathers.
- **Late June to mid-July** — The parents encourage their young to fly by starving them down to flying weight and performing precision flying demonstrations.

For a fledgling falcon, the city is dangerous terrain full of steel, concrete and glass. This year, there are three young falcons that will learn to fly in downtown Salt Lake. Since 1986, about 72 percent of the fledglings have survived their flight training.

Every summer, dedicated volunteers spend days watching for — and retrieving — the young falcons who encounter mishaps in the first couple weeks of flight. To volunteer your time, visit **wildlife.utah.gov/peregrine** or call Bob Walters at 801-209-5326.

Peregrine falcon facts

- **Distribution:** Cosmopolitan, but they can live in regions that range from Arctic to temperate climates
- **Lifespan:** 10 to 12 years in the wild; 20 years in captivity
- **Length:** 10 to 20 inches (females are larger than the males)
- **Wingspan:** 36 to 45 inches (females are noticeably larger than the males)
- **Weight:** 1 pound 4 ounces to 2 pounds 12 ounces
- **Plumage:** In most peregrines, the dark head appears hooded. Their back feathers are slate grey (dark brown on juveniles), and they have cream-colored underfeathers. There's a thick dark "mustache" mark (called a malar) below the eye.
- **Eyesight:** Up to eight times better than human vision
- **Song:** In protest, a loud, rapidly-repeated "kak, kak, kak"
- **Flight speed:** 175 to 200 miles per hour in a vertical dive
- **Abundance and seasonal status:** Nests in Utah; occasionally seen during fall migration and sometimes through the winter
- **Nesting habits:** Tall, sheer cliff faces, often near water; occasionally on bridges, buildings and towers
- **Number of eggs laid each year:** Typically three to four
- **Wintering habits:** Southern North America, Central America and South America
- **Food**: Other birds, nearly always caught in mid-flight; fledglings often chase after and catch flying insects, such as dragonflies

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources