

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

Documents from Environmental Organizations

Maine Environmental Collection

2011

Avian Haven Feisty Story 2011

Avian Haven

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/maine_env_organizations

Repository Citation

Haven, Avian, "Avian Haven Feisty Story 2011" (2011). *Documents from Environmental Organizations*. 42. https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/maine_env_organizations/42

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Documents from Environmental Organizations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

the story of
FEISTY
(also known as 40/U)
An Indomitable Peregrine Falcon

Avian Haven Case # 2011-31

Admitted January 28

Released April 8



How it all began for us . . .

On January 28, we received a call from ME DIFW Biologist Judy Camuso about a Peregrine Falcon reportedly “hung up on a fence” on Sewall Street in Portland. A local Animal Control Officer had been contacted about the bird; when he retrieved it, he reported it to Judy, saying that it was badly injured. Judy asked if we could make arrangements to get the bird here.



Diane called Jane Thomas, one of Avian Haven's volunteer transporters in the Portland area. In a remarkable set of unusual coincidences, Jane happened to: have brought her cell phone to work with her that day; have it in her pocket set on “vibrate” rather than turned off; be in a part of the building with cell reception at the moment our call came in; and have nothing pressing to do right then. She explained the situation to her supervisors; they said “GO!”



We had the bird just a few hours later. He was, indeed, "badly injured." There was a large, deep laceration on the underside of the left wing. Remarkably, however, the wing bones were intact.

And the bird was banded:
The color band code was
Black 40 over Green U.



The bird seemed to be very stressed from his ordeal. Rather than add to that stress with a prolonged procedure, we opted for a quick application of antiseptic and a Tegaderm™ bandage. A more thorough clean-up could be done later.



The wing was then immobilized with a wrap to the bird's body.



Next, the bird was given fluids, some pain medication . . . and then tucked into an intensive care unit for the night.





We finished up the day by downloading all the intake photos, then selecting a few to send to Judy Camuso and to Charlie Todd, Maine's Peregrine biologist. Of particular interest was the numbers on the bands, which we knew could identify the bird.



The following day, Jan. 29, our veterinarian, Dr. Judy Herman, examined the bird. She closed the wound with sutures, but the flesh had basically been shredded, and the sutures had come loose by the next day. Given how cold it had been, we knew the wound might also be complicated by frostbite. If so, in addition to the soft-tissue damage of the wound per se, more loss of viability could be expected as a result of frostbite, though these effects would not show up immediately. We began a program that was to continue for some weeks; every 2-3 days, with the bird under anesthesia, our infirmary manager, Shelley Spanswick, cleaned and dressed the wound. On Feb. 3, the wound area looked necrotic in some spots.



On Feb. 3, we had an e-mail From Patrick Keenan, of BioDiversity Research Institute; Judy had forwarded our e-mail about the Peregrine to him. Patrick and Judy knew exactly who the bird was, for on May 28, 2009, while the bird was still in the nest, they had applied the bands that now identified him. Patrick also mentioned that the bird had been the star of BRI's peregrinecam in 2009, and asked permission to share our information with his online peregrinecam community.

Very soon after that, we began receiving e-mails from members of that community. We learned that the bird had been nicknamed "Feisty" - and that he had quite a following! It wasn't until much later that we saw stills from the peregrinecam, and learned how he came by his nickname. . .



. . . but it seems appropriate to share his early history at this point in our story.

How it all began for Feisty . . .

By the end of April 2009, four eggs had been laid at the nest featured in BioDiversity Research Institute's peregrinecam.



Unlike the typical songbird nest, traditional Peregrine nests are depressions in the substrate of a cliff ledge, created by the parents scraping the substrate material out to the sides. The nest depression -- known as a "scrape" -- helps keep the eggs from tumbling over the ledge.

Artificial nest sites created for Peregrines usually provide trays of gravel, in which the parent birds create their scrapes. This tray is at the top of a raised platform, which can be seen in stills captured by the camera outside the nest box.



Only one of the four eggs hatched, so from the beginning, this little falcon was very special. BRI's peregrinecam recorded these scenes on the bird's hatch day, May 1, 2009

The little hatchling soon had a devoted following of people from all over the country who watched the peregrinecam daily. Several individuals in particular shared vigils, staying in contact via forum postings as well as by telephone.



May 13-15: Roughly two weeks after hatching, the little falcon is noticeably larger, and already practicing wing stretches.



On May 16, events occurred that shook the peregrinecam community. As recounted to us recently by Ann ("Annie O"), Kathy, and Kit, on that day: An intruder Peregrine appeared near the entrance to the nest box, once while Feisty was "home alone," and again a few minutes later, while Mom and Feisty relaxed together. Mom jumped up screaming; her first reaction was to push Feisty to safety behind her, toward the rear of the nest box. She chased the intruder away, not knowing that little Feisty had tumbled from the tray and was behind the box.

When Mom returned, Feisty was nowhere to be seen. In seeming confusion at his absence, she attempted to brood the three nonviable eggs. Finally, we heard Feisty crying, and knew he was alive. Mom heard him too and began looking for him. He made his way to the side of the box where we could see him, and there, much to our relief, she found and fed him.





At one point, she managed to get down into the space and tried to push him back up onto the tray. She did not succeed, but she continued to feed him. Finally, she took hold of him by the nape of his little neck, heaved him back up onto the tray, and began to brood him. We were all cheering, laughing, and crying.



It was after that episode that another of the forum members, Linnie, dubbed the bird "Feisty." The name stuck, but the day's story doesn't quite end there . . .

We all watched carefully for any further sign of the intruder. One week later, we awoke to find Mom shredding the obvious remains of a Peregrine and feeding it to Feisty.

Unfortunately (or fortunately!), the stills captured from that day's videostream were lost from the forum archives.

After the intruder episode, things settled back down to normal. The parent birds continued to keep their little falcon extremely well fed, and Feisty continued to grow quickly!



The devotion of the parents was captured repeatedly by the camera.



When Judy and Patrick banded Feisty on May 28, part of the procedure was measuring leg size and weighing in order to judge whether the bird was male or female. Raptor females are larger than males; on the basis of this youngster's size at that day's age, it seemed likely that Feisty was female.



Just a few days after being banded, Feisty looked noticeably more like an adult Peregrine. Inside the nest box, he spread his wings as if ready for take-off. He even ventured out onto the pole in front of the nest box.





Feisty left that pole, officially fledging, on June 6.

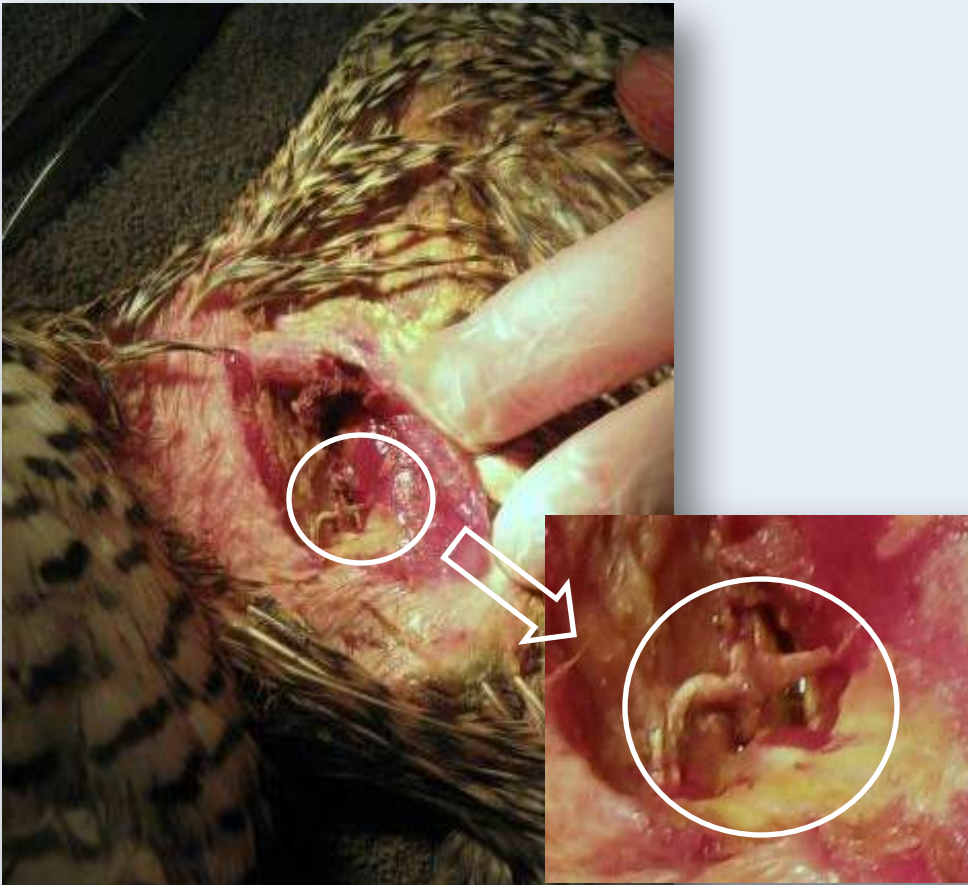


He occasionally returned to the nest area after that. A still shows him near the scrape in late August; Kit remembers seeing him on the peregrinecam for the last time on Sept. 9.

Feisty's fans were to hear no more of him, until the news of his arrival at Avian Haven reached the forum community.

Meanwhile at Avian Haven . . .

On Feb. 6, there was bad news. Shelley removed several pieces of necrotic tissue, and we could see that a tendon had snapped. We had just finished a course of antibiotics, but decided to start another. Despite all that, Feisty seemed to remain in good spirits, and continued to eat well.





On Feb. 8, we heard from Benson Gray, the person who had made the initial calls about the injured falcon. According to his account, the Peregrine had first been seen on the window ledge of a conference room at 50 Sewall Street on the morning of Jan. 27. After remaining there for about an hour, he walked some thirty feet through the snow, and climbed up on a wire fence. At one point, he spread his wings, and the wound under the left one was visible.



Benson had contacted the Animal Control Officer on the 27th, but was advised to wait and see if the bird was still on the fence the next morning. He was, and the director of the organization agreed to pay the ACO to come for the bird.



The cause of the injury was unknown, and was to remain a mystery.

Shelley continued with careful but aggressive wound management. On Feb. 8, for the first time, the wound looked better than it had on the previous occasion. We also e-mailed Patrick the bird's current weight and wing measurements; we believed Feisty was male, and wanted Patrick and Judy to confirm. A short while later, Patrick agreed: Feisty was a guy! Apparently (as an only child) he had been exceptionally well fed while growing up. 😊



On Feb. 10, it appeared that the wound was starting to granulate in, and there was no sign of infection. As the month continued, improvements continued also; there were fewer and fewer pieces of necrotic tissue for Shelley to remove. On Feb. 20, we estimated that the wound had closed to about 2/3 of its original size, with all the tissue pink and healthy-looking.



Feb. 20: Here, Feisty is cradled in Shelley's arm, still half-asleep after anesthesia. The photos below show him awake just a few minutes later.



The wound area is covered with a hydrocolloid dressing. Feathers had been plucked away from the wound site to help keep the area clean.

On Feb. 28, the wound no longer needed a dressing. Being able to leave the wing unbandaged allowed him to indulge in some new activities, like bathing! The photo below was taken on March 2. The wound has closed up almost completely.



But as good as the wound now looked, given the snapped tendon, we could not imagine how Feisty could regain the perfection of flight a Peregrine needs. Dr. Herman concurred. We opened negotiations for placement with Hope Douglas at **Wind Over Wings**, a highest-quality conservation education organization based in Dresden (windoverwings.org). Hope agreed to give Feisty a home and the paperwork necessary for a permit was begun.

But before we could finalize the transfer of Feisty to Wind Over Wings, we needed to confirm that he was permanently crippled. On March 13, we moved him to a small outside cage, about 16' x 14'. We set up the area with plenty of "handicap access" to the higher perches, believing he would not be able to reach them by flight.

At rest, his left wing usually had a noticeable droop, though one view from the back showed both wings held more evenly.



Feisty's first flight attempts were very labored; he could barely make it across the area, and we believed this would be the best he could ever manage. However, true to his name, he kept working, and within just a few days, he had mastered that space.

So on March 17, we moved him into a larger flight cage, this one 16' x 40'. Within a few days, he could make that length, though he really had to work. But on March 24, Marc saw him fly the length, bank and turn, and fly back again. To say we were surprised would be an understatement!

On March 29, we asked Glori to spend some time in this area, photographing him in flight, so we could see whether the left wing could get full extension.

Some of her photos are on the next two slides.

Prepare to be amazed!







There was one more upgrade to make. The afternoon of the day the previous photos were taken, he was moved into our largest cage for flight conditioning - an arena that features a continuous oval flyway, in which birds can fly multiple laps of about 160' each, without stopping. Feisty flew two laps on his first try.



Just a few days later, on April 1, Diane watched him fly 15 consecutive laps (a total of nearly half a mile). She assured the forum that no, this was not an April Fool joke!

Meanwhile, we had kept Hope in the loop; she cheered Feisty's unexpected progress right along with us, and gladly withdrew her request to obtain an education permit for Feisty. When we explained the reason for the cancellation, our state and federal permit officers were as delighted as we were.



We had bought this sign for the flyway at a conference in February, never guessing at the time that it could ever apply to Feisty!



It had become clear that Feisty would, after all, be able to return to the wild. On April 6, we talked to Charlie Todd, the Peregrine biologist with Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, about potential release sites.

By this time of year, Peregrines were already breeding, and would be aggressively defending territory. Charlie emphasized that Feisty should not return to the Portland area, or anywhere else where there was an active nest in progress (just look at what happened to the intruder at Feisty's nest!). As we discussed several possibilities, a nearby area comfortably between two active nests (in Bucksport and Camden) surfaced as a good choice: Belfast. Belfast also offered a bridge as a potential nest site plus a good prey base of pigeons. Diane notified the forum group that release would likely be in a few days, and folks who lived within driving distance began making plans.



But Feisty had plans of his own. On the morning of April 8, he was literally flinging himself against the flyway walls. Waiting any longer would run the risk of breaking feathers or injuring himself in his emphatic attempts to be free. Weather conditions were favorable; we decided to go for it. Diane quickly notified the group that Feisty would be headed for Moose Point State Park, just north of Belfast, in a couple of hours.

Unfortunately, the notice was too short for most forum members. But Ann ("Annie O") walked into her boss's office, said "I have to leave" - and when she explained why, her boss agreed! She left Ellsworth before we had even captured the bird, and was the first of the release party to arrive at Moose Point.



Photo by Terry Heitz

To capture a bird in the flyway, a mesh curtain is drawn; coming around a loop, the bird will fly onto the mesh, from which it can be netted.

Marc nets Feisty, then walks with him toward the infirmary.



We take one last look at the wound site; only a slight scarring remains near the leading edge of the wing.



But what about the torn tendon? After Feisty began to fly, we wondered if the snapped fiber might actually have been a ligament, and sent the photo on Slide 20 to wildlife veterinarians at Tufts. But they confirmed our initial judgment - it was a tendon! They too would have expected flight impairment, but commented, "This case shows how little we sometimes know about wildlife medicine."

Glori takes a few last close-up photos before everyone gets in the car.



Feisty owes his imminent freedom to Shelley, whose skillful wound management had preserved his wing's flight capability, against all odds. He is about to leave her hands, one last time.



That's Ann on the right.



Photos by Terry Heitz

The little girl is the daughter of friends of Shelley's who were visiting that day. She had recently had been hospitalized, but was cheerful that day and remarked to Shelley afterward: "I bet no one else in my class has ever done something like this!"



Photo by Terry Heitz



Photo by Terry Heitz

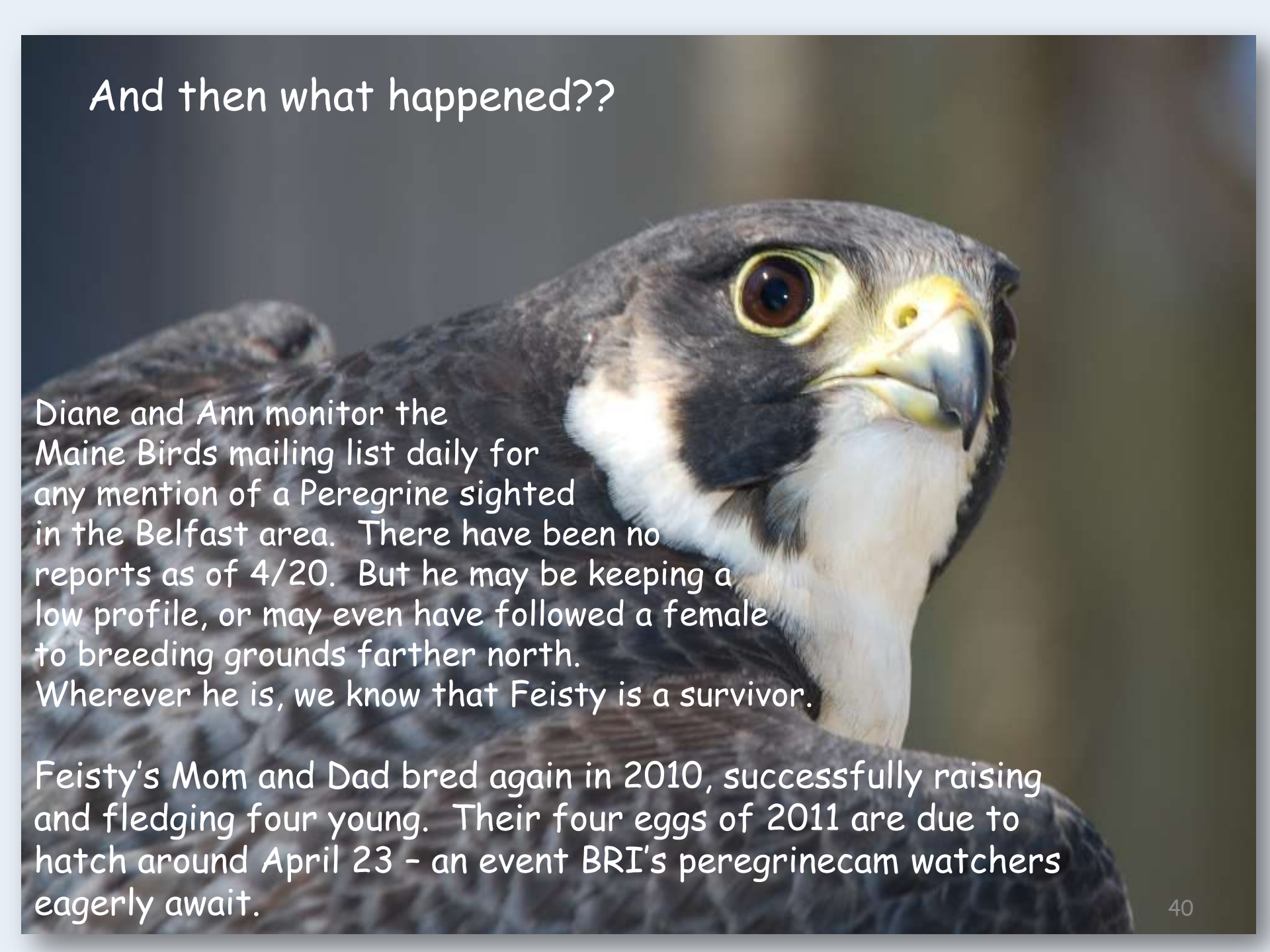
and from another angle . . .





Feisty flew from Shelley's hands to a tall nearby tree , from which he appeared to be getting his bearings. After a few minutes, he took off, first heading west, then banking to turn south, headed toward Belfast . . . and the rest of his life.

And then what happened??



Diane and Ann monitor the Maine Birds mailing list daily for any mention of a Peregrine sighted in the Belfast area. There have been no reports as of 4/20. But he may be keeping a low profile, or may even have followed a female to breeding grounds farther north. Wherever he is, we know that Feisty is a survivor.


Feisty's Mom and Dad bred again in 2010, successfully raising and fledging four young. Their four eggs of 2011 are due to hatch around April 23 - an event BRI's peregrinecam watchers eagerly await.

Avian Haven's work is a group effort; we made many new friends at and through BRI along our journey with Feisty. In particular, we thank: "Year of the Feisty" forum members Kit McGlinchey, Ann Weimer and Kathy Kettelkamp for messages of appreciation and encouragement, as well as historical details and anecdotes; Keith Thomas for still shots from BRI's peregrinecam; and Patrick Keenan, our Feisty forum contact person.



For more information:

BioDiversity Research Institute
www.briloon.org
(follow links to peregrinecam)

A Peregrine falcon is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, against a background of dense green foliage. The bird is positioned diagonally across the frame, from the bottom left towards the top right. The text is overlaid on the image in white.

Avian Haven

Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center
A Nonprofit 501(c)3 Organization

www.avianhaven.org

Donations made in honor
of Feisty will help ensure
that our doors always
remain open for
Peregrines in need.

418 North Palermo Rd.
Freedom, ME 04941

Diane Winn & Marc Payne