Many were hatched and raised as part of the program's restoration of this endangered species, but none were as special as this young peregrine.

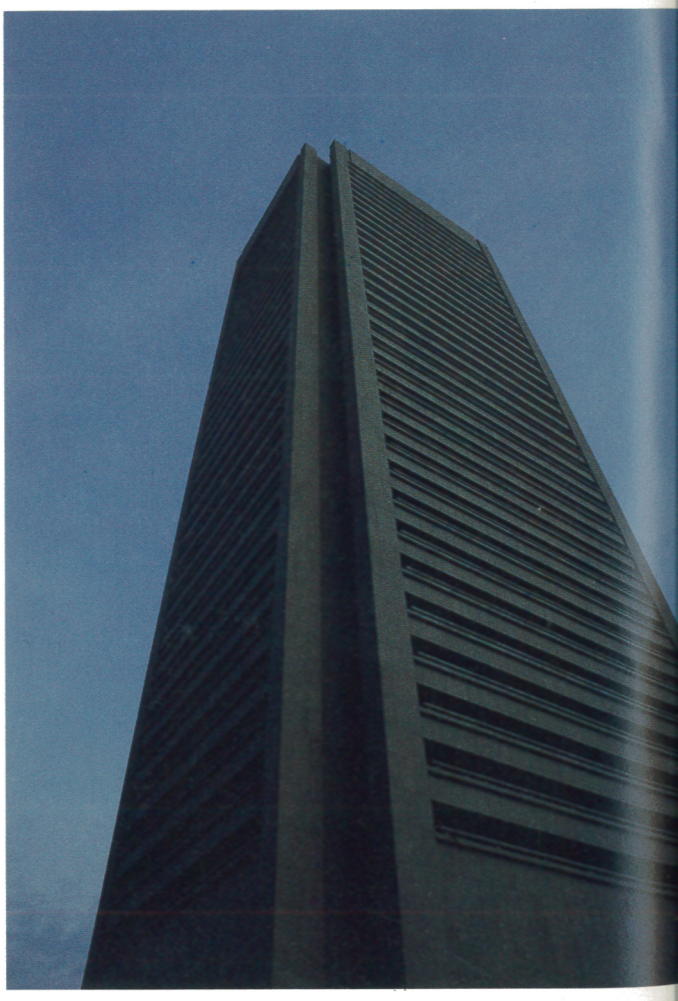
Chosen for release in 1977 from Carroll Island, a wildlife refuge maintained by the U.S. Army and located at the mouth of northeastern Maryland's Gunpowder River, she was spotted in Baltimore on and around the 37-story USF&G Insurance building.

She wasn't naive. She was hungry, and the pigeon species certainly wasn't endangered in the city. She needed a home, and the USF&G building is the highest "cliff" in Baltimore. Of the 37 floors, she chose the 33rd, nesting on the south ledge.

The location she chose was ideal. In cities, young peregrines are considerably safer from predators than in the wild. There is plenty of food (pigeons and other birds) and the threat of being hunted by humans is reduced. At USF&G, an employer of about 9,000 people, the young falcon hardly went unnoticed. She was named Scarlett by The Peregrine Fund after the heroine in "Gone With The Wind." Personnel from USF&G and the fund constructed a nest called a "scrape" to entice her to stay.

Thus began the cooperation between The Peregrine Fund and USF&G to monitor Scarlett's activity. A USF&G employee and former Smithsonian Institution ornithologist, John Barber, became liaison to The Peregrine Fund. The fund and USF&G attempted to provide Scarlett with a mate in the hope that peregrines could once again be born and raised without further human intervention.

USF&G



SCARLETT
1977-1984

BLUE MEANIE & MISHA
1979

Peg Barber

In the early spring of 1979, after waiting two years (the age at which female peregrines can successfully mate), The Peregrine Fund introduced Scarlett to two tiercels (male falcons), Blue Meanie and Misha, brought from their laboratory home in Ithaca, New York.

In March, 11 year-old Blue Meanie was put inside a cage and placed on a ledge near Scarlett to encourage the two birds to form a pair-bond. Scarlett began laying eggs and, after the second egg, Blue Meanie was released. Ornithologists were hoping that his release would result in the fertilization of the remaining eggs Scarlett was to lay. He and Scarlett flew wing tip to wing tip for about 10 minutes before Blue Meanie disappeared. He was found dead from a gunshot wound six months later near Ottawa, Quebec.

Misha was released shortly after Blue Meanie. After showing no interest in Scarlett, he was recaptured and returned to the lab at Cornell.

That spring, Scarlett laid a total of three infertile eggs. Near the time they would have hatched, ornithologists of The Peregrine Fund waited until she left her nest and replaced the eggs with three eyases born in their labs. She returned shortly and minutes later was brooding the young by pushing them under her breast feathers for warmth.

RHETT
1980-1981

When Scarlett was introduced to Rhett in the spring of 1980, they appeared to be a successful match. Rhett began presenting her with food and they "paired," displaying characteristics of friendship and compatibility. During courtship flights, they interlocked talons and "tumbled" before they let go and resumed soaring.

All hopes were shattered, though, when it was discovered that, for the second time, Scarlett had laid infertile eggs. The explanation was that Rhett and she were introduced too late in the spring for successful mating.

Once again, her eggs were replaced with four eyases. Rhett remained and helped her raise them, and hopes were high that the next year would be more successful.

Unfortunately, in November 1980, Rhett was found dead from strychnine ingested after eating a poisoned pigeon.

There were no mates available to release for Scarlett in 1981. Her infertile eggs were replaced with five eyases which she adopted and raised successfully.

Pat Bernstein

PERCY & ASHLEY
1982-1983

Percy didn't last long. City living wasn't in his blood, and he flew away shortly after being released in 1982. Percy was later recaptured and returned to the labs at Cornell. Concurrently, a fifth male, Ashley, was released. Although he was much more cooperative, Scarlett laid infertile eggs and she and Ashley were given four adopted chicks to raise.

In early 1983, Ashley was injured by a gunshot wound. He was placed under the care of Dr. Arthur Peck, one of three doctors in Maryland then licensed to care for hawks, falcons, and other birds of prey. After a month, Ashley was released from the top of the USF&G building.

However, only a week after being released, Ashley was found dead on Baltimore's Key Bridge, apparently hit by a vehicle.

A sad sequel to Ashley's death, the two eyases Scarlett was given later that spring lived only five weeks. Urban buildings with reflective glass pose a particular, and in this case fatal, problem. When the young birds are learning to fly, they sometimes fly into windows, occasionally with enough force to knock themselves to the streets surrounding the building. Usually these stunned, young peregrines can be captured and returned to the ledge, with no permanent damage. However, that spring one of the young birds died after flying into a window. The other died after eating a poisoned bird.

BEAUREGARD
1983-

It seemed to Scarlett's many fans that her problems would never end, and the ornithologists were unable to control her fate.

In July of 1983, employees working near her nest saw not one but two birds flying together. And while on her ledge, Scarlett became very noisy, seemingly calling out to what ornithologists thought might be another peregrine. Observation proved the bird to be a peregrine. At first, it was thought to be a female which Scarlett, being extremely aggressive, was frightening away from her territory.

Soon, the bird landed on the ledge. Small and very timid, it flew off before anyone could identify its leg band. After a few more landings, John Barber discovered that the peregrine lacked any leg bands. It was a male, quickly dubbed "Beauregard" by a member of USF&G's Corporate Communications Department.

Beauregard was a wild peregrine whose origin can only be guessed. Ornithologists and employees crossed their fingers. Should Beauregard stay the winter, there was a good chance that Scarlett and he would produce offspring.

By February, Beauregard was presenting food to Scarlett. It was early spring when Scarlett laid four eggs and, unlike Rhett or Ashley, Beauregard began sharing the incubating duties. For the first time, Scarlett had a full-fledged partner to help her through this tedious time.

Ornithologists' hopes were realized on April 6 when the first of four eyases pipped its way out of an egg. The others hatched on April 7 and 8, and history was made. These chicks were the first known to have hatched outside of captivity in an eastern North American city since the 1950s when the pesticide DDT brought the species near extinction east of the Mississippi. Three females and one male were raised successfully and left the nest by fall to seek out their own territories.

BLYTHE
1984-

Peg Barber

In September 1984, after seven years of life, 17 adopted eyases, and the history-making birth of four of her own, Scarlett died. Although taken to the Baltimore Zoo for care, a throat infection had severely weakened her. An autopsy revealed that she had died from starvation and the infection. It also showed that Scarlett had several old gunshot wounds, all of which had completely healed.

Beauregard spent several days following her death standing in their scrape calling out to her over the harbor. Four days later, a female peregrine was spotted flying with Beauregard and sitting on various ledges of the USF&G building, including the nesting ledge. Through the window, observers saw that she had been banded and a quick tracing of her number by John Barber revealed her origin as Brigantine, New Jersey. She had been born in 1983 but not spotted since fledging and had been drifting in the ensuing 15 months.

She was given an Old English name, Blythe, meaning "joyous," reflecting the feelings of the peregrine fans of USF&G and Baltimore. Throughout the winter, she and Beauregard defended their territory from window washers and red-tailed hawks and, in February 1985, began mating flights which resulted in four fertile eggs. One female and three males were hatched.

At six weeks, two of the young peregrines, including the female, died. Again, reflective glass was the culprit. The other two left to find their own territories.

Only time will reveal the end of this story. There is a limit to human control of the restoration of an endangered species to a safe, secure number. Once in their natural habitat, the chance of falcon offspring reaching adulthood is 50 percent. It is hoped that The Peregrine Fund, and those who cooperate with its objectives, such as USF&G, can continue to provide the opportunity for this species to survive.

THE PEREGRINE FUND

The Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus) *is a nearly extinct species of the order* Falconiformes, *which includes 22 species of falcons. The peregrine is one of five found in the United States and is the only one which faces such a threat.*

During the 1930s, there were approximately 1,000 nesting pairs nationwide, 300 to 400 of which lived east of the Mississippi. The rest primarily nested in the Rocky Mountains.

During the 1940s, peregrines began disappearing from their natural habitats in mountainous regions and cities. Investigations into their disappearance proved that the pesticide DDT was strongly responsible for this annihilation. DDT was used to protect trees and crops from insects. Smaller birds fed on the insects sprayed with DDT, and peregrines indirectly ingested the poison when feeding on the contaminated birds. Scientists found that the peregrines' reproductive capabilities were weakened by the chemical, inhibiting calcium metabolism and producing thin-shelled eggs too fragile to survive in the wild.

By 1965, the peregrine population nearly vanished east of the Rockies. Although DDT was banned in 1972 after studies confirmed its detrimental effects on the environment, the birds were not breeding in eastern North America.

In 1970, amid considerable skepticism, Cornell University established the Eastern Peregrine Falcon Reintroduction Program, better known as The Peregrine Fund. The program began after ornithologists from the United States, Canada, and several European countries met at a peregrine conference at the University of Wisconsin in 1965. Concerns about the possibility of the peregrine becoming extinct in North America were voiced, and a program was initiated to attempt to produce peregrines in captivity.

Doubts were strong about breeding peregrines in captivity and then reintroducing them to the wild. However, ornithologists felt that through research on captive breeding, peregrine habits, and habitat requirements they would be able to restore the eastern peregrine population to a healthy number.

The hawk barn, Cornell's Behavioral Ecology Facility or breeding chamber, was built in 1970 and can house up to 80 peregrines. It is here that peregrines are bred and raised before being released in areas similar to their wild environment.

Once released, ornithologists hope that the birds will naturally pair, mate, and produce offspring, thus re-establishing the species. Releases have been made throughout the eastern United States and, recently, in the Rockies and West Coast areas, and the techniques of this reintroduction program have been so successful that they are now being applied to a number of other endangered birds of prey.

For more information about peregrine falcons in North America or to join The Peregrine Fund, write The Peregrine Fund, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, New York 14850.

The Peregrine Fund

Peg Barber