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Peregrine Falcon by Michael Blencowe of the Sussex Wildlife Trust

You say you want a revolution

Circling high in the blue skies above Sussex is one of the world's deadliest predators. Peregrines are hunting above us. Scanning the avian traffic in the Sussex airspace, their incredible vision locks on to an unsuspecting bird passing below and the Peregrine instantly negotiates one of the most sophisticated aerial manoeuvres possible. They stop flying. With wings and feet tucked in tightly, peregrines drop from the sky at an unbelievable speed – hurtling earthwards at up to 200 mph - the fastest creature on our planet. Everything, even the eyelids and nostrils on this bird are built for speed. Like a bomb made out of muscle and feathers, it'll decimate any victim in its path.

We're fortunate to still have these amazing birds here in Sussex. During WW2 their taste for pigeons (including those carrying wartime messages) saw Peregrines treated as if they were on the payroll of Mr Hitler himself. The Secretary of State for Air declared war on these falcons and issued the 'Destruction of Peregrine Falcons Order'. The birds were slaughtered, their nests destroyed. After we gave Adolf the old heave-ho, Peregrines were left alone and numbers began to recover. But they were to face an even more deadly threat than the British Government; Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (or DDT to its friends).

Farmers worldwide had started spraying a variety of wonderful new chemical insecticides all over the countryside to improve yields. These invisible poisons hit the bird at the top of the food chain the hardest. In 1958 there were 650 pairs of Peregrines in Britain. Six years later there were 68. Concerns over their decline sparked an investigation that led back to the source of the Peregrine poisoning and the world's eyes were opened to the reality of the damage that these chemicals could cause to our environment and to us. Rachel Carson wrote 'Silent Spring', the environmental movement was born and green was upgraded from a sort of yellowy-blue colour to an entire way of life.

Today, perched on our cliffs and cathedrals, high above the organic food-filled shelves in kitchens across Sussex, the killer that kick-started the environmental uprising stands defiantly overlooking us all like a beaked Che Guevara. A feathered testament to revolution, strength and tofu veggie burgers.

Ends

Sussex Wildlife Trust is an independent charity caring for wildlife and habitats throughout Sussex. Founded in 1961, we have worked with local people for over half a century to make Sussex richer in wildlife.

We rely on the support of our members to help protect our rich natural heritage. Please consider supporting our work. As a member you will be invited to join Michael Blencowe on our regular wildlife walks and also enjoy free events, discounts on wildlife courses, *Wildlife* magazine and our Sussex guide book, *Discovering Wildlife*. It's easy to join online at www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/join