

# Mystery unfolds in South Bend falcon nest: A new beau and a female intruder.

*Will our old friend Maltese prevail and lay her eggs?*

**Joseph Dits**

South Bend Tribune



SOUTH BEND — Love is up in the air — that is, questionable — for the city’s peregrine falcon pair. It’s a sort of triangle, if you want to call it that, and one of them is an “intruder,” a rather pugnacious one.

At stake here are eggs that could be laid any day now in the nest box atop the County-City Building.

So, we set off to get answers.

Here's the deal. The male and father for the past four years, Peace, apparently hasn't returned this season. But a new guy has. It appears to be Flash, or M/52 as the bands on his leg read. Alert falcon camera watchers at [Bird Cams Around the World](#) (or BCAW) spied this turnover on [South Bend's FalCam](#).



We spoke with Mary Koher, a volunteer at [Soarin' Hawk Raptor Rehabilitation Center](#) in Fort Wayne, who verified that M/52 is indeed Flash, a male hatched from the Fort Wayne nest atop the Indiana Michigan Power building in 2019.

Meanwhile, the female Maltese, who is in her seventh year in the South Bend nest, could be laying her first egg soon. She'd been seen raking the floor of the nest, a sign that bird experts say she's preparing to lay.

**First 2 eggs of 2021:** Peregrine falcon lays two eggs (so far) in nest box in downtown South Bend.

This guy Flash showed up last month. Jean Galloway, of Evansville, tells us that she and other BCAW watchers who follow the South Bend cam noticed him soon after the camera was turned back on Feb. 22. She's not an expert, but she's been watching bird cams for 10 years, and she saw how Maltese and Flash bowed to each other out of acceptance. She even saw them mate this past Sunday.

Then, in a move that troubled other watchers in an online discussion at BCAW's website, an unknown and unbanded female — the “intruder” — seemed to appear on Monday. Maltese and the intruder clashed in an apparent fight on Tuesday. The fight starts two minutes into the video.



Galloway believes she observed a slight scratch between Maltese's beak and right eye.

“I hope Maltese prevails,” Galloway said.

But apparently, Galloway added, the intruder stopped into the nest again Wednesday morning, and that's “discouraging.”

The state ornithologist, Allisyn Gillet, who works for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, tells us that the intruder is probably a young falcon, hatched in the wild, who's trying to establish her own territory, her own nest.

Gillet said that females can fight for hours, trying to see which one can claim control of a nest.

"They will fight to the death, unfortunately," she said.

She guesses that Maltese will probably go ahead and lay her eggs when they're due. And she may have to continue fighting the intruder after they're laid. If the intruder wins, she could kick Maltese's eggs aside and lay her own, Gillet said. The good thing for Maltese, Gillet said, is that she's older and "has more experience."

Our usual regional expert from the Audubon Society is out of town. He hasn't investigated the case yet. So questions remain: How long will Maltese and Flash stick together? Who is the intruder? How much longer will she keep visiting?

### **2021's migration season:** Migrating warblers sweep into Indiana Dunes fest as falcons hatch in South Bend

What we do know is that Maltese had originally flown up from Milwaukee before nesting in South Bend. Peace had come from Mt. Clemens, Mich. They had their first brood together in 2017. Last year, they laid four eggs, three of which hatched.

Before that, Maltese had paired up with a male named Zeus for two seasons, and then he didn't come back.

Meanwhile in Fort Wayne, falcon love has been pretty steady. Koher, who lives just a few minutes from the nest there and helps with fallen birds, said there have been just two pairs who've mated since that nest went up in 1996. That

includes Moxie and Jamie who've been there since 2013, plus an original pair before them.



To date, a total of 65 chicks have come from the Fort Wayne nest. This week, I&M reported that Moxie and Jamie laid four eggs between March 13 and 19, as seen through the nest's camera. The eggs typically hatch one month later.

Oh yeah, another question: Where's Peace? No one's certain about South Bend's beau.

Gillet said this could be an "ominous" sign since falcons, who migrate south for the winter, normally return to the nest where they've repeatedly hatched chicks. So something bad could have happened to Peace.

The BCAW's long-time watchers of the South Bend FalCam miss him. And, hey, couldn't we all use some Peace now?

*Email South Bend Tribune reporter Joseph Dits at [jdits@sbtinfo.com](mailto:jdits@sbtinfo.com). Follow him on Facebook at [SBTOutdoorAdventures](#).*