

Pale Male, red-tailed hawk who nested above NYC's Fifth Avenue for 30 years, dies at 33

May 17 2023, by Karen Matthews



Pale Male, a red tailed hawk, leaves his nest with a rat he just caught hanging from his beak, Thursday, Feb. 17, 2005, in New York. Pale Male, who brought a touch of the wild to swanky Manhattan as he nested above Fifth Avenue with a succession of mates for more than 30 years, died late Tuesday, May 16, 2023, after being found ill and grounded in Central Park, wildlife rehabilitator Bobby Horvath posted on Facebook. The hawk was believed to be 33 years old. Credit: AP Photo/Julie Jacobson, File

Pale Male, a red-tailed hawk who brought a touch of the wild to swanky Manhattan as he nested above Fifth Avenue for three decades, has died.

Pale Male died late Tuesday after being found ill and grounded in Central Park, wildlife rehabilitator Bobby Horvath [posted on Facebook](#). The [hawk](#) was believed to be 33 years old.

Horvath posted that he picked Pale Male up and took him to his rehab group's veterinarian, who did bloodwork and X-rays. The hawk later ate a small meal but remained weak and lethargic, Horvath said. "We hoped for any improvement, but sadly it was not meant to be," he said.

Pale Male, so named because of his whitish plumage, was first spotted in Central Park as a juvenile in 1991 and began nesting on Fifth Avenue across from the park in 1993.

Bird lovers crowded inside the park to watch as Pale Male and his succession of mates hatched and raised their young each spring.

The birders were outraged in 2004 when Pale Male's nest with then-mate Lola was ripped from its ledge on the 12th floor of a ritzy apartment building whose residents included actor Mary Tyler Moore and CNN anchor Paula Zahn. Moore publicly opposed the nest removal.

The co-op board, which had voted to remove the nest as a hazard, quickly reversed itself and restored a row of anti-pigeon spikes that the hawks had used to anchor their nest, and even added a new metal "cradle" on the ledge. Pale Male and Lola rebuilt their nest.

As his legend grew, Pale Male was the subject of a 2009 documentary, "The Legend of Pale Male," and at least three illustrated children's books.

Horvath wrote in his post that Pale Male inspired bird lovers and photographers around the world. Some took up bird photography professionally, he wrote, but "most were just [local residents](#) or tourists who just wanted an opportunity to get a glimpse of this famous hawk."

David Barrett, who runs birding Twitter accounts including Manhattan Bird Alert, said that for much of Pale Male's life "he was not only the world's most famous red-tailed hawk, but he was probably the world's most famous bird, one that people knew by name."

Barrett said the hawk's fame "shows that even in an intensely urban place like Manhattan, there are many people who have a fondness for wildlife and feel a connection to it."

It is difficult to know with 100% certainty that the hawk that died Tuesday was Pale Male, since Pale Male was never banded.

Some observers began wondering around 2021 if Pale Male had died and been replaced in the Fifth Avenue nest by another hawk who resembled him.

No eggs were observed in the [nest](#) in recent breeding seasons, which Barrett said points toward the likelihood that the resident male hawk was in fact an elderly Pale Male, no longer interested in propagating.

Horvath said he believes the hawk whose final hours he witnessed Tuesday was Pale Male, a bird he has been following for 20 years.

"I've rescued babies of his that were poisoned," Horvath said in an interview. "I have a history with his family."

If Pale Male did live past 30, his life was one of the longest ever recorded for a red-tailed hawk. He survived several mates including

Chocolate, Blue, Lola and Lima. His most recent mate was Octavia.

He is survived by an unknown number of descendants.

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