

Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus

Natural History



Description: The Peregrine Falcon is a medium sized raptor with a gray back, head, tail and dark malar stripes. Its chest is off-white with dark barring. The feet, legs and cere are yellow. Males and females are similar in coloration, yet females are up to 1/3 larger than males. In North America there are 3 recognized Peregrine Falcon subspecies which range in size and coloration (*anatum*, *pealei* and *tundrius*). Immature Peregrine Falcons are chocolate brown with vertical brown streaks on the breast.

Vocalizations: Peregrine falcons have a distinctive *cack* call made when defending their eyrie (nest site). Young falcons utter shrill begging calls and will even hiss when approached by a human. Adults use a variety of vocalizations including a chitter, an “eechip” and a wail.

Habitat: Peregrine Falcons are found worldwide and they use a broad range of habitats. Territories typically include a cliff site for nesting and an open area for foraging. Man-made structures, such as bridges, towers and buildings are increasingly being used for nesting.

Migration: Peregrine Falcons are low-altitude migrants and use many migratory routes, including the East Coast shoreline and the Mississippi Flyway in North America. Migration is not uniform and can be described as a “leap-frog” pattern, as falcons may migrate past other falcons which remain on their territory year-round.

Diet: Peregrine Falcon are stellar aerial predators, diving at speeds in excess of 200 miles per hour to catch and kill other birds, which make up 77-99% of their diet. Prey may be captured and killed in the air, or it may be struck mid-air with the falcon’s feet and killed on the ground by cervical disarticulation. Prey size ranges from hummingbirds to Sandhill Cranes.

Lifespan: Maximum life-span for a wild peregrine is 16-20 years and 25 years in captivity.

Breeding: In resident falcons the pair remains on the territory year round, while in migrants the male arrives first and claims the territory. Many scrapes (nest sites) have been used for over 50 years. The nest is merely a depression scraped into sand or gravel on a ledge. The female will lay 3-5 eggs, which hatch after 33 days. Young fledge at 30-45 days.



Conservation Status: Once extirpated from the Eastern U.S. due to DDT and persecution, Peregrine Falcons have made an amazing recovery and were removed from the Endangered species list in 1999.

Range Map: The Peregrine Fund

Reference: “The Birds of North America” No. 660, 2002 by Cornell Lab. of Ornithology & The Academy of Natural Sciences