



Peregrine Falcon

How can peregrine falcons be identified from other birds?

Peregrine falcons are the largest falcons in most of North America, distinguished by their long pointed wings and tail. Like most falcons, males are smaller than females. Adult peregrines are blue-gray, with horizontal bars across their white chests.

What do peregrine falcons eat?

Peregrine falcons catch medium-sized birds, like pigeons or ducks, mostly out of the air. In pursuit of prey, the peregrine can travel around 70 mph, but they are most well-known for their speedy aerial dives, called stoops, where they can reach speeds up to 238 mph as they nose dive towards their prey from impressive heights!

Do any animals eat peregrine falcons?

The peregrine falcon's predators include gyrfalcons, eagles, great horned owls, and other peregrine falcons.

Where do peregrine falcons live?

Peregrine falcons are widespread, found on every continent except for Antarctica. They nest on skyscrapers, cliffs, and other tall natural or manmade structures. They are common along coasts, where they have access to many shorebirds, ducks, and pigeons for feeding.

Unlike many birds, peregrine falcons do not build nests beyond a simple scraping of their ledge to create a slight depression in the sand, gravel, or soil.

Do peregrine falcons live here year-round?

Not all peregrine falcons migrate, but some of the populations that do migrate have one of the longest migrations of any North American bird. Peregrine falcons in the more northern climates (Alaska, Canada, Greenland) migrate as far as South America for the winter, traveling more than 15,500 miles in a year. Baltimore's peregrine falcons do not migrate because the winters are milder.

At a Glance

Scientific Name: *Falco peregrinus*

Body Length: 13-20 inches

Wingspan: 31-48 inches

Weight: 1-3.5 lbs

Avg. Lifespan: Up to 17 years

Diet: Medium-sized birds (ex. pigeons, ducks, seagulls)

Habitat: Cliffs, skyscrapers, other tall structures

Reproduction: 2-5 eggs each year

Incubation period: 29-35 days

Nestling period: 35-45 days

Population Status: Least Concern
(removed from U.S. Endangered Species List in 1999)



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Adult peregrine falcon with outstretched wings.



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Peregrine falcon eggs in a typical gravel scrape.



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Adult peregrine falcon catches its prey in midair.

How do peregrine falcons raise their young?

The female peregrine lays 2-5 eggs each spring. The female does most of the incubating, while the male brings her food. When the chicks hatch, they rely on their parents to bring food. Both during incubation and after hatching, peregrines are even more territorial, attacking anything that would harm their young. After only 5-6 weeks, the young falcons, called eyases, are ready to fly, spending the next few months learning to hunt and survive before leaving their parents' nest.

Why were peregrine falcons on the U.S. Endangered Species List?

The peregrine falcon eastern population almost disappeared from the 1950s to the 1970s because of DDT poisoning. Pesticides used in agricultural fields, marshes, and elsewhere were accumulating in the peregrines, damaging the female's ability to lay healthy eggs. With the ban of DDT in 1972 and the Peregrine Fund's extensive efforts to reestablish eastern populations through captive breeding, the peregrine falcon has been steadily recovering. In 1999, the peregrine falcon was removed from the U.S. Endangered Species List because of its stable and widespread populations. According to Partners in Flight, the global breeding population is estimated to be 140,000.

Fun Facts

- The name "peregrine" means "wanderer," named for its widespread distribution and ability to travel long distances.
- Falcons have been used for hunting for over a thousand years – the peregrine has always been a prized bird for falconry, considered birds of royalty throughout history.
- Many believe the peregrine falcon is the fastest bird in the world, recorded at 238 mph during a hunting dive – that's as fast as a race car!
- Some airports use trained peregrine falcons to scare off birds that could collide with airplanes, keeping the skies safe!

Questions?

Contact us at info@chesapeakeconservancy.org

Sources:

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