



## Peregrine Falcon Fact Sheet

### Peregrine Falcon

### *Falco peregrinus*

New York Status: Endangered

Federal Status: Not Listed

### Description

This crow-sized falcon is admired for its incredible speeds which are seldom exceeded by any other bird. Plunging from tremendous heights, the peregrine falcon can reach up to 180 mph in pursuit of prey. It feeds primarily on birds, which it takes on the wing.

Adult peregrines are slate-grey above and pale below, with fine dark bars and spots on their underparts. Both adults and immatures have a wide, dark "moustache" mark below the eye. The tail is narrow and the wings long and pointed. Juveniles are brown overall, with dark streaking below. Airborne, this falcon can be recognized by characteristic rapid wingbeats interspersed with long glides.

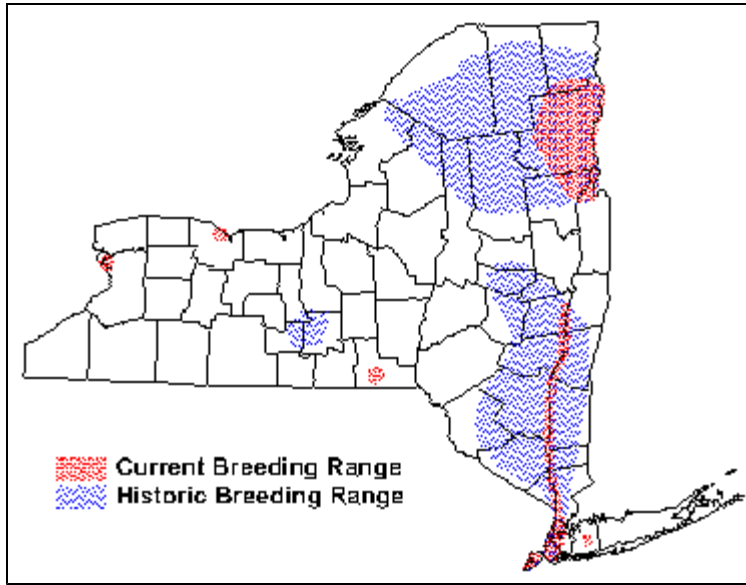


### Life History

Peregrine falcons generally return to the same nesting territory annually and mate for life. The courtship flight is a spectacular sight. The pair climbs high in the air and performs a precise acrobatic act of whirling spirals and steep rapid dives, often touching in midair. The average clutch consists of three to four eggs which hatch after an incubation period of 29-32 days. The single brood fledges after 35-42 days. Both parents participate in incubation and brooding activities, but the female remains at the nest for the majority of the time while the male hunts and brings food to her and the young. Young falcons may stay in the area for about six weeks after they fledge, developing their flying and hunting skills. Sexual maturity is generally reached at two years of age, but one-year-olds have been known to produce young. Individuals may live as long as 20 years.

### Distribution and Habitat

The worldwide range of peregrine falcons is more extensive than any other bird. In addition to North America, they are found in southern South America, Eurasia, Africa and Australia. Natives of this continent



formerly bred from Alaska and Greenland south to Georgia and Baja California. That range has been greatly reduced. Wintering occurs as far north as British Columbia and Massachusetts, as far south as Central America and the West Indies.

Within its range, this falcon prefers open country from tundra, savannah and sea coasts, to high mountains, as well as open forests and tall buildings. Nests are built on high ledges, 50 to 200 feet off the ground. The nest itself is a well rounded scrape and is occasionally lined with grass.

## Status

Like many other birds of prey, peregrine falcons have suffered from the use of pesticides. Exposure to DDT and other chemical contaminants has caused population declines since the 1940's. These pesticides cause eggshell thinning which drastically lowers breeding success.

At one time, there were approximately 350 breeding pairs in the eastern U. S., including 40-50 historic eyries (nest sites) in New York. By 1965, all were gone and populations in other parts of the country showed similar declines. Release programs initiated by the Peregrine Fund in the mid 1970's have resulted in peregrine falcons breeding in New York once again. In 1998, 38 pairs were present in New York, 36 bred, 31 were successful and 69 young fledged. New urban nests have been reported upstate for the first time in Albany. Gradual increases in the breeding population have been recorded throughout the east.

## Management and Research Needs

Laws banning the use of DDT were passed by New York State in 1971 and by the federal government in 1972. Although DDT contamination has been reduced in this country, it continues to affect the peregrine and its prey outside our borders. Peregrine carcasses and unhatched eggs continue to be analyzed for DDT and other contaminants.

Hacking has proven to be a successful means of reestablishing a breeding population in the wild. Young raptors are placed at an artificial nest site and cared for until they are able to fly and hunt on their own. Through hacking, over 2,000 peregrines have been released in the U. S. and Canada. The number of breeding pairs in New York has grown steadily since 1983, when the first peregrines in decades returned to nest on bridges in New York City. This success has eliminated the need for hacking in most eastern states, including New York. Management has now shifted to locating, monitoring and protecting breeding pairs.

## Additional References

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Drawing by Karen L. Allaben-Confer