

Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey



National Conservation Area

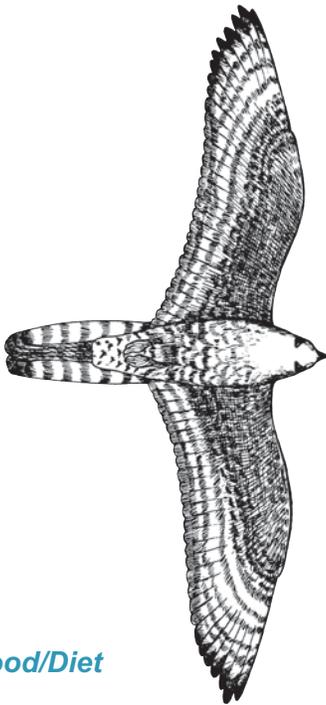
Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

Description/Size

Wing span: 34-44 inches

Length: 15-20 inches

Weight: 1.1-2.7 pounds



Food/Diet

Voice

Like all falcons, peregrine falcons have large heads, notched beaks, and “heavy shouldered” streamlined bodies. Medium to large falcon with prominent black crown. Plumages very similar between sexes. The face has prominent dark mustache patches set beside a variably white cheek. Cere and eye-ring are yellow. Eye is very dark. Beak is bluish gray with a dark tip and yellowish base. Chin and throat are white. Legs and feet are yellowish with black talons. Male has a dark back and upper tail, and light heavily barred and spotted underparts. Female is generally dark grey-brown above, paler brown below and much more heavily barred than the male with large drop shaped spots on the breast. Females are up to 15-20% larger and 40-60% heavier than males. Juveniles are generally dark brown, heavily streaked birds with some variations between subspecies. In North America there are three subspecies – *F.p. anatum*, the American peregrine; *F.p. pealei*, Peale’s peregrine, and *F.p. tundrius*, the arctic peregrine—with variations in plumage and range.

Similar Species

Prairie falcon – more brownish, coloration not as contrasting, less prominent mustache mark. Gyrfalcon – more evenly colored and lacking the boldness in the mustache mark. Juvenile peregrines and gyrfalcons easily confused at a distance – underwing of peregrine is uniform; gyrfalcon has two toned underwing.

Habitat/Range

Worldwide distribution; this falcon is found on every continent except Antarctica, and lives in a wide variety of habitats from tropics and deserts, to the tundra, and from sea level to 12,000 feet. Habitat is open country with suitable cliffs for nesting and perching. Also found in urban areas. Worldwide there are 19 subspecies recognized.

Peregrines chiefly hunt birds but will occasionally take mammals, reptiles, insects or amphibians. Diet differs among regions, habitats, and seasons. Birds that are taken range in size from warblers to small geese.

Peregrines search for prey while perched or in flight.

They use a variety of hunting techniques, but typically

prey is captured in mid air after fast pursuit or a stoop to catch the prey. The stoop is a high speed drive from a great height which may reach speeds between 100-240 mph.

When overtaking a bird in mid-air, the peregrine may strike its prey with a tremendous killing blow with clenched feet or snatch it up in its talons. With larger prey, they will then ride them to the ground. Peregrines sometimes walk along the ground in search of nestlings, rodents, insects and reptiles. Peregrines usually kill their prey by biting and breaking the animal’s neck. Prey is typically taken to a plucking perch. Excess food is often stored in a cache, particularly during the breeding season.



Usually quiet away from nest site, except for aggressive encounters. Most Peregrine vocalizations can be categorized as a *cack*, chitter, *eechip*, or wail. A harsh *kak kak kak kak kak* is given in alarm and in conjunction with nest defense.

Behavior

Active flight with shallow but stiff powerful smooth wing beats. Soars on flat wings with widely spread tail. Wing tips appear broad and rounded when soaring, and narrow and pointed when gliding. Some northern peregrine falcons are migratory and will head towards less cold areas in autumn. Peregrines are not adverse to crossing large bodies of water during migration. Peregrines regularly cross the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. Some peregrines are long-distance migrants that make one-way journeys of up to 8,000 miles. Northern tundra breeders in Greenland and Canada travel as far south as central Argentina and Chile. Some populations show a leap-frog migration pattern where northern populations winter to the south of populations from more southerly locations. Flap or soar on migration.

Reproduction/Nesting

Clutch size: 3-4 eggs
Eggs: sub-elliptical, creamy to browns with blotches of warm browns, 2.1 x 1.6 inches
Incubation: 33-35 days
Fledge: 5-6 weeks
Disperse: 6-8 weeks

Peregrine falcons frequently nest near water on ledges of rocky cliffs or buildings. They do not build nests, but scrape a small depression to hold eggs within a nest site. Occasionally will use abandoned stick nests of other species. A nest site must provide protection from weather and potential predators and it must be in or near an adequate prey base. May nest in tree cavities, on the ground and on manmade structures. First breeding is generally at two years. Peregrines perform awe-inspiring aerial displays during courtship. Actively defend nest against other raptors.

Life Span

Longest recorded – 19 years 6 months

Conservation Status

Not on the US Fish and Wildlife's Endangered or Threatened Species List. However it is protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Idaho Fish & Game lists the peregrine falcon as a protected non game species for which it is illegal to collect, harm or otherwise remove from its natural habitat. The BLM considers this an imperiled species in Idaho - it is experiencing declines in population or habitat and is in danger

of regional or local extinctions in Idaho in the foreseeable future. In 1970, two subspecies of the peregrine falcon were listed as Endangered in the US under the Endangered Species Conservation Act, the precursor to the Endangered Species Act. This was due to pesticides like DDT which cause the female to lay thin-shelled eggs which were easily broken, killing the embryo inside. DDT was banned in 1972, and in 1973 the peregrine received protection under the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Captive breeding programs were initiated, and The Peregrine Fund released more than 4000 captive-reared birds in 28 states over a 25 year period. In 1994, the arctic subspecies was delisted as recovered, and in 1999 the American subspecies was also delisted. Environmental contaminants still remain as a potential source of mortality. Habitat loss and collisions with buildings, vehicles, aircraft and wires are other sources of mortality.



Viewing in the NCA

Interesting Facts

Spanish name:
Halcón pollero,
Halcón peregrino

Sources

The peregrine falcon is a rare visitor to the NCA, typically migrating through in fall and spring. Historically, there was a peregrine nest near the confluence of the Snake and Bruneau Rivers but that has not been occupied for over 60 years.

- The scientific name comes from the Latin word *falx* meaning “scythe”, referring to the shape of the wing and shape of the talons and *peregrinus* meaning “to wander.”
- Other names: Duck hawk, Big-footed falcon, Wandering falcon.
- Outward pointed, cone shaped projections in the center of the round nostrils slow down the air flow to allow fast flight without damaging the bird’s lungs.
- Peregrine falcons have adapted to living in cities which offer building ledges for nesting, large populations of pigeons and starlings for food and few natural predators.

AXIA CD ROM - Know Your Birds of Prey

Bird Banding Lab - www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/homepage/long3120.cfm

Carolina Raptor Center - www.carolinaraptorcenter.org/p_falcon.php

Hawk Mt. Sanctuary - www.hawkmountain.org/media/peregrine.pdf

Idaho Fish&Game - <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/nongame/birds/birdspecies.cfm>

National Audubon Society - The Sibley Guide to Birds

The Peregrine Fund - www.peregrinefund.org/Explore_Raptors/falcons/peregrin.html

Birds of North America Online - <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/660>

US BLM – <http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/prog/wildlife.html> - sensitive species list

US FWS - http://ecos.fws.gov/tess_public/pub/listedAnimals.jsp

and www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/regulationspolicies/mbta/mbtintro.html

Illustrations - courtesy of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

Map - The Peregrine Fund

Peregrine Falcon
(Falco peregrinus)



Adult



Immature



Photos: Know Your Birds of Prey, Axia CD ROM