

Endangered Species and Spaces

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4.8 Peregrine Falcon *anatum* subspecies: *Falco peregrinus anatum* (Bonaparte)

Order: *Falconiformes*
Family: *Falconidae*

Status

Global Rank: G4T3
Provincial Rank: S2B, SZN
COSEWIC: Endangered

Provincial Listing: **Red list**



Distinguishing Features

The Peregrine Falcon is a powerful crow-sized falcon, resembling the Prairie Falcon, but has a conspicuous head pattern and is much darker above (blackish or blueish) rather than sandy brown. The crown, hind-neck, face and well-defined mustache mark are blackish in colour. Under parts buffy white to pinkish, heavily streaked with blackish-brown (Godfrey, 1986).

Distribution

Columbia Basin: Isolated occurrences in the southern part of the Columbia Basin. May have formerly bred in the East Kootenays (Cannings et al. In prep.).

British Columbia: Extent of the current range has yet to be determined. Formerly bred in the Okanagan, and the drainages of the Fraser and Peace rivers (Campbell et al. 1990). There are also indications that peregrines formerly bred in the east Kootenays. The current known range is concentrated in the southwest mainland and Gulf Islands /southern Vancouver Island region, with a few local breeding pairs in the south and central interior. May be more widespread than is currently known (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Global: Breeds throughout the forested regions of North America (excepting the coasts of Alaska and n. British Columbia) south to Arkansas, ne. Louisiana, Tennessee, n. Alabama and Georgia. Winters from Vancouver Island south to California and from Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, s. Nebraska, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, s. Ontario, New York and the Maritime Provinces south perhaps as far as Argentina and Chile (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Habitat

The American Peregrine Falcon typically prefers inaccessible cliff ledges particularly near shores and marshes frequented by shorebirds and waterfowl. Peregrines in large cities have adapted to use tall buildings, towers, and bridges as the ecological equivalent of a nesting cliff. On rare occasions they will nest in a tree cavity or an old stick nest. There is little or no actual nest, just a scrape or slight depression on the cliff ledge. Aeries described in British Columbia are all on the ledges of cliffs (6 - 260 m high) that overlook marine waters, large lakes and rivers (Campbell et al. 1990. Cannings et al. In prep.).

Threats

Current population trends are not clear, although recent increases and reports throughout the range provide some reason for optimism. A pair nested for the first time in 35 years in the Okanagan Valley in 1996, increasing the hope that British Columbia's populations will follow the continental trend towards repopulating former breeding territories. Loss of wetland foraging habitats to urban and agricultural development is an ongoing and significant threat. Cliff nesting habitat is secure in British Columbia, but development of hillsides below nesting cliffs or recreational use of cliffs may be a local problem since peregrine falcons can be sensitive to repeated human disturbance at aeries. Pesticides were determined to be the major cause of population declines in North America. The use of DDT still persists in some parts of their Latin American winter ranges (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Biology

American Peregrine Falcons feed primarily on songbirds, shorebirds, and waterfowl in natural habitats, and European Starlings and Rock Doves in urban areas. Flocking species frequenting open areas are generally preferred. Although a wide variety of species are taken, usually a relatively small number of species dominate the diet in any given locality. Well known for their speed, peregrines have been clocked at speeds up to 290 km/h while stooping in pursuit of prey (). Birds are generally taken in flight from above, with the blow from the feet of a stooping peregrine usually enough to kill the prey instantly. (Godfrey 1986. Campbell et al. 1990., Cannings et al. In prep.).

Eggs are probably laid in the first half of May, a typical clutch for peregrines being 3 - 5. Eggshell thickness, and hence egg viability, is extremely sensitive to tissue levels of the pesticide DDT, and its derivative DDE. The incubation period is 32 - 34 days. Young are able to fly at about 35-40 days after hatching, but remain dependent on the adults for food for several weeks after they leave the nest (Godfrey, 1986. Campbell et al. 1990., Cannings et al. In prep.).



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