



DEP Fact Sheet



Peregrine Falcon

- Length 16-20" Wingspan 36-44" Weight 1 ½ to 2 ½ lbs.
- Peregrine Falcons, also known as duck hawks, feature a black crown and nape; black wedge extends below eye, forms a distinctive helmet. Tail is shorter than Prairie Falcon; wing tips almost reach end of tail; also lacks dark bar and axillaries underwing. **Adult:** shows rufous wash below; **Juvenile:** is dark brownish above, underparts are heavily streaked.
- **Voice:** A repeated *we-hew* or a harsh *cack cack cack* notes when agitated at nest site.
- **Eggs:** 2 to 4 creamy white eggs covered with rich brown markings; 33- to 35-day incubation period.
- **Range:** Inhabits open wetlands; preys chiefly on birds. Also feeds on bats. Nests on cliffs, tall buildings, and bridges. Use of pesticides helped eliminate eastern breeding populations; banning of these toxins and reintroduction programs led to rebounding populations.
- Cornell University ornithologists pioneered the restoration of Peregrine Falcons; raising peregrines from captive parents and releasing the young birds into suitable habitat.
- Peregrines have long pointed wings and fly with quick rowing wingbeats similar to those of a pigeon. In attacking prey-ducks, pigeons, blue jays, flickers, and other birds, a peregrine folds its wing close to its body and dives at speeds sometimes exceeding 200 mph. This behavior is known as a *stoop*.
- These raptors strike with their large knobbed feet, usually breaking the prey's back and killing it outright. When the prey falls to the ground, the falcon picks it up and carries it to a convenient perch to be eaten.
- Peregrines traditionally nested on high cliffs overlooking eastern Pennsylvania river systems and in similar environs across North America to the Arctic Ocean and around the globe.
- Some of the earliest ornithological authors in Pennsylvania (Turnbull 1869, Mombert 1869) listed the species as a breeder. Nesting was confirmed even on Philadelphia's City Hall for several years (Groskin 1947, 1952).
- In the short period between the mid-1940s and 1965, Peregrines experienced a sharp drop in reproductive productivity and were totally eradicated from the eastern United States (Enderson 1965; Hickey 1969). By 1961, Poole documented no nesting in Pennsylvania. Again, the decline has been attributed to pesticides -- DDT in particular (Hickey 1969).
- Currently listed as state endangered by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

