

## **Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)**

### **Field Marks:**

- length: 14-23 in, wingspan: 20-24 in
- bluish-gray back and creamy white belly feathers with dark, horizontal banding
- bluish-gray coloration over face and under eyes creating a hooded appearance
- pointed wing tips when seen in soaring flight
- pale to bright yellow cere, feet, and eye outline in adult birds



### **Breeding Range:**

The word Peregrine means “wanderer” and peregrines nesting in northern latitudes are difficult to monitor due to their nomadic habits. This species was once very rare due to DDT contamination, but now the current breeding range covers much of the world. It is absent as a breeder only from the Amazon Basin, the Sahara Desert, eastern Asia, and Antarctica.

### **Wintering Range:**

As long distance migrants, Peregrine Falcons may travel as much as 16,000 miles annually. Not all Peregrines are migratory; however, some pairs may remain in their breeding territory year-round. Migration generally follows a north-south path, but some subadult, non-breeding falcons may simply wander.

### **Habitat Preferences:**

They occur in many habitats throughout the Americas with slightly higher concentrations in tundra and coastal regions. The Peregrine Falcon thrives in areas with high prey concentrations and suitable nesting sites. Peregrine Falcons have been reintroduced into large cities where their primary prey item is the Rock Pigeon.

### **Nesting:**

The Peregrine Falcon prefers to nest on cliff faces or flat mesa tops, although nest sites, or ‘eyries’, may also be located on large buildings. Peregrines use artificial nesting platforms and flat-roofed buildings in areas with high prey availability. Clutch size varies with latitude, and ranges from 3-6 eggs. Larger clutches are found in southern latitudes. Eggs are incubated for 33-35 days, and young fledge 10 days after their first flight. Parental care of young continues for 5-6 weeks after the young first leave the nest in migratory populations, and 9-10 weeks for non-migratory populations.

### **Feeding:**

They feed primarily on other birds, taking a variety of sizes from songbirds to small geese depending on the size of the hunting Peregrine. They also prey on medium-sized mammals including bats, and sometimes steal mammals or fish from other raptors.

### **Flight Speed:**

Peregrines hunt in a variety of ways, but the most well known method is the high speed “stoop” during which the falcon can reach speeds of 200 mph. This is the fastest recorded flight for any bird species. Migratory flight averages 20 miles/hour, although one individual traveled from Chicago to Tennessee in one day flying at approximately 40 miles/hour!

### **Conservation Status:**

Peregrine Falcon populations sustained a substantial loss in 1960-1970 due to DDT contamination. Egg shell thickness decreased approximately 20% causing widespread nest failures. In 1975, the Peregrine Falcon was listed as endangered, when only 39 breeding pair of Peregrine Falcons were found in the Continental United States. Since the ban of DDT in the United States, shell thickness has been restored to normal. Due to captive breeding programs, Peregrine Falcons were removed from the Endangered Species list in 1999. At the end of the twentieth century, populations were estimated at 8,000-10,000 pairs in the Continental United States and rising.