

Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*)

Field Marks:

- length: 14.6-18.5 inches; wingspan: 35.4-44.5 inches
- large falcons, nearly the same size as the Peregrine
- mostly brown, with pale undersides featuring brown markings; darker markings from armpit to wrist
- brown “mustache” stripe, as well as a dark malar stripe



Breeding Range:

Some Prairie Falcons remain year-round residents of western states, their territory extending far into Mexico, others have distinct breeding and wintering ranges. Of those that do migrate, many breed in lower Canada; they are notoriously aggressive when it comes to defending their nest sites.

Wintering Range:

Many stick to the open hills, plains, and deserts they inhabit year-round, though in winter a greater number are found in farmland and around lakes reservoirs throughout the west.

Habitat Preferences:

The Prairie Falcon is iconic of the west. This raptor favors deserts, grasslands, plains, and prairies. The species may also be found in open country above the treeline in the high mountains.

Nesting:

Prairie Falcons are particular in where they make their nests. A mated pair may take as long as a month scouting sites for their nest, though they will usually select a natural crevice or cliff ledge. Cliff nests are utilized in order to protect vulnerable young from predation. Prairie Falcons have also been known to utilize trees, powerline structures, and tall buildings as nest sites.

Feeding:

These raptors use a wide range of hunting techniques. They are often spotted in a steep dive in pursuit of other birds in flight. They may also fly low to the ground, in order to take prey by surprise. They like to make meals of small mammals, insects, and other bird species. Nesting pairs may cache extra food.

Conservation Status:

Though Prairie Falcon populations have declined in developing western areas, their populations remain strong across the country. Prairie Falcons are particularly vulnerable to the effects of pesticides, so conservationists are actively working to continue tracking the numbers of these species in the US, paying close attention to any sharp declines.