



ANIMAL SECTION – Birds

PEREGRINE FALCON

ABOUT

The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) has a black head with a white throat and cheek patch. The back and wings are slate grey and underneath it is white to buff with blackish-brown spotting on the breast. When in flight the wings are long and pointed. The grey tail is long and rounded with narrow black bands and a white tip. Female Peregrines reach a length of 20 inches (51 cm) and have a wingspan of 46 inches (117 centimeters) and are larger than the male – 2 to 2.75 lbs (0.9 to 1.25 kilograms) compared to 1.25 to 1.5 lbs (0.6 to 0.7 kilograms). The cere (raised fleshy area at the base of the beak) and the feet are bright yellow. Peregrines eat many flying creatures, including medium to small birds, bats and insects. During courtship, beginning around the age of three, they give amazing aerial displays. The pair then lays 3-4 eggs in the “scrape”, a hollowed out depression on the chosen nesting site. Both parents help to incubate the eggs for approximately 28 days. The young depend upon their parents for food and protection for up to 42 days before they can fly. Young Peregrines are brownish in color, and apart from their throat the underside is streaked with brown.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Peregrine Falcon is considered, by many, the fastest bird in the world and holds the current air speed record at 208 miles per hour. The decrease in numbers of Peregrines was noticed as early as the mid-1950s, coinciding with the increased use of the pesticide DDT. The combination of the banning of DDT in the United States in the early 1970s and an intensive reintroduction program has helped the slow increase of nesting Peregrines in the eastern U.S. Between 1987 and 1990 West Virginia released 53 young Peregrines at 4 cliff sites in 3 counties. Current difficulties for the Peregrine include illegal capture for falconry, changes in their food base due to habitat alteration, and being shot by humans.

For more information visit: www.wvdnr.gov.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

When did the Peregrine Falcon begin to decrease in number?

- a) 1930s
- b) mid-1950s
- c) between 1987 and 1990
- d) early 1970s

Answer is B.

