

# Peregrine FALCON



## PEREGRINE FALCON

Scientific Name: *Falco peregrinus*

Range: East of the Rocky Mountains and south of the tree line

Peregrine Falcon populations decreased drastically between the 1940s and 1960s, and they disappeared completely from Ontario in 1963. This was caused by reproductive failure after exposure to the pesticide DDT. Between 1977 and 1996 600 captive-raised young were released in Ontario. This has helped increase their populations.

## HABITAT

Peregrine Falcons have adapted to life in our cities. Food is plentiful there and the tall buildings proved high perches and nest sites. In the wild, Peregrine Falcons like to nest on tall, steep cliff edges close to large bodies of water.

## APPEARANCE

These birds of prey are slate blue-gray on top with long tapered wings and a tapered tail. They have distinctive black sideburns on the face. They are a medium sized bird of prey, at about 38 - 50 cm long. The

females are larger than the males. They have a white throat. Their legs, feet and the base of their beak are yellow.

## YOUNG

Adults begin nesting around two to three years of age. They usually mate and lay two to four eggs in late March or early April. The eggs are incubated for about a month. The young grow flight feathers in three to five weeks and take their first flight when they are about 40 days old. They begin to hunt on their own between nine to twelve weeks of age.

## WHY ARE THEY OF CONCERN?

Peregrine Falcons populations declined because of the use of the pesticide DDT. The falcons' prey became contaminated, and this in turn affected the falcons. The falcons died or became infertile. DDT also interfered with the female's ability to make sturdy eggs. The thin-shelled eggs of a female Peregrine Falcon exposed to DDT would crush under her weight while she tried to incubate them.



Bans on DDT in North America have helped the Peregrine Falcon to recover. However, these birds migrate to parts of Central and South America where the laws on pesticide use are not as strict, and so they continue to pick up pesticide residue.

## WHAT DO THEY EAT?

Peregrine Falcons eat pigeons, medium to large songbirds, shorebirds, ducks and sometimes even bats and other small mammals. They catch their food in the air or knock it to the ground. They do this by dropping quickly from great heights. A Peregrine Falcon using this hunting dive, or "stoop", can reach speeds of up to 330 km per hour!

