

## PEREGRINE FALCON

*Falco peregrinus anatum, Falco peregrinus tundrius*

Coloradans now have the opportunity to see peregrine falcons regularly in our state due to the reduction of pesticides.



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**A** MEDIUM-SIZED HAWK that formerly nested in many parts of the world, including North America, the peregrine falcon has rebounded after a precipitous decline.

Characterized by a nearly black helmet, a dark slate-blue coloration on the back and a buff coloration broken by horizontal bars on the underparts, the adult peregrine varies in length from 15-22 inches. Like all falcons, it has long, pointed wings and quick, steady wing beats in flight.

The principal prey of the peregrines are small- to medium-sized birds such as swallows, blackbirds, robins, doves, pigeons and shorebirds. Peregrines can be seen hunting their prey around water and along cliffs and canyons, including the "canyons" of downtown Denver.

There are two subspecies of peregrine falcons – the American (*anatum*) and the Arctic (*tundrius*). Arctic peregrines migrate through Colorado. The American breeds and nests here.

Peregrines prefer to nest on high, precipitous cliffs and river gorges such as those found in the Rocky Mountains. Although they've never been abundant, their numbers in Colorado became critically low in 1972. In that year, there were no breeding pairs in the state. Through

intensive reintroduction efforts there are currently 100 nesting sites in Colorado.

The major causes of population decline were the injurious effects of the pesticide DDT and the loss of important nesting and feeding areas due to human encroachment. Of the two, DDT has been the primary culprit.

The problem with DDT is that it accumulates in adult peregrines when they eat contaminated prey. Eventually it causes thinning of the shells of peregrine eggs, and the eggs break before they hatch. Fortunately, DDT has been banned in the United States, but some peregrines that nest here are still exposed to this pesticide when they or their prey migrate to Latin America.

Due to the combined efforts of many state, federal and nonprofit agencies, Coloradans have the opportunity to see peregrine falcons in our state. Now that the devastating effects of DDT have been significantly reduced, peregrine falcons are able to raise enough young to ensure their populations will continue. All we have to do is make sure their nesting sites remain undisturbed and their prey species have habitat that supports them.

Successful recovery efforts have led to the removal of the peregrine falcon from both the state and federal list of threatened and endangered species. It will remain a state species of special concern.