

Manitoba's Species At Risk

Endangered

Peregrine falcon

Falco peregrinus



Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

The Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is an Endangered bird of prey that breeds from Alaska and northern Canada to southern South America. A crow-sized bird, it has a hooked beak, powerful claws, keen eyes and long, pointed wings that enable it to fly at great speed. It has a broad black moustache or sideburn stripe that extends below its eyes, bluish-grey wings, back and shoulders and a light buff-white underside marked with horizontal brownish bars. Young Peregrine falcons have brown upper bodies and buff-coloured undersides streaked with black vertical barring.

In flight, all falcons can be distinguished from hawks by their long, pointed wings and quick wingbeats. Peregrine falcons are similar in size to Prairie falcons. Prairie falcons, however, are sandy coloured with a white eye-line over the eyes, a narrow moustache and noticeable black patches in the wingpits. Prairie falcons are usually found in Manitoba only during migration.

Habitat

Peregrine falcons prefer open habitats such as tundra, grassland, sea coasts and marshes, but will also hunt in open forest. Nests are built on ledges of steep cliffs or embankments, usually near wetlands frequented by shorebirds and waterfowl. In areas where humans live, peregrines often nest on tall buildings with ledges. Pairs maintain a nesting territory of at least one kilometre radius. This prevents other pairs from nesting too close and protects nearby hunting areas. They also have an extended, undefended territory or home range that can extend up to 27 km from the nest.

Life History

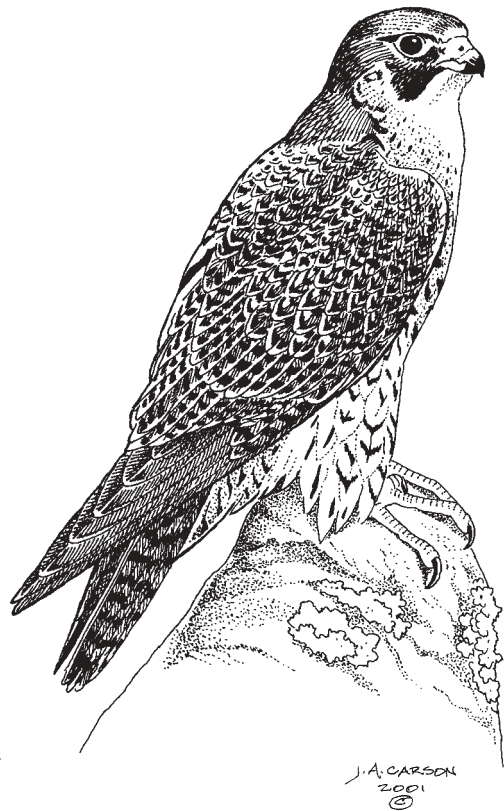
Peregrine falcons arrive in Manitoba in March and are incubating their eggs by mid-April or May. Several nest sites are usually selected within their territory, with the female ultimately choosing which nest

will be used. The nest is usually a well-drained scrape or depression on a cliff ledge. Pairs nesting in downtown Winnipeg and Brandon regularly choose ledges or wooden nest-boxes near the top of tall buildings. Pairs may use the same nest site for years, occasionally switching to alternate nests in their territory especially if their previous year's nest failed. Two to five eggs are laid and incubated by the female for 28 to 34 days. The male occasionally shares incubation duties. Young remain in the nest for 35 to 40 days after hatching and are dependent on the adult birds for five more weeks after learning to fly. In many parts of southern Manitoba, peregrines are only seen during migration in spring (April to May) or fall (August to October). Most birds migrate to the southern United States and often into South America. Some, however, migrate only short distances or not at all as long as the weather is mild and food is abundant.

Peregrine falcons begin breeding at two to three years of age. Many return to the area where they were raised but move on if that territory is occupied. The average life span is four to five years, though some may live 20 years or more. Peregrines feed almost exclusively on other birds which are generally caught in flight. Pigeons make up a large part of the bird's diet in urban areas, but marsh birds and waterfowl can also be an important food source.

Distribution

The Peregrine falcon has been divided into three subspecies, with two of them seen in Manitoba. The *tundrius* or tundra subspecies breeds north of the treeline in the Arctic, and migrates through Manitoba in spring and fall. Occasionally, birds are seen in northern Manitoba during the summer, but they have not been confirmed breeding there. The *anatum* subspecies is found from the boreal forest south to Mexico. This subspecies breeds in at least 25 cities in North America, including Winnipeg and Brandon.



Manitoba's Species At Risk

Cool Facts

In most years, Peregrine falcons can be found nesting on the Radisson Hotel in downtown Winnipeg. The McKenzie Seeds Building in Brandon is also a regular nesting site. Birds are also observed frequently in Winnipeg around the Manitoba Legislative Building and at the University of Manitoba.

Examination of the food brought back to the nest by a pair in downtown Winnipeg revealed that a large percentage of the diet was made up of shorebirds and other medium-sized marsh birds.

Up to three pairs have nested simultaneously in Winnipeg in recent years. Due to the size of the Peregrine falcon's home range, it is unlikely that more pairs could establish in a city of this size in any given year.

When hunting, Peregrine falcon dives have been timed at speeds of up to 290 km/hr, making it one of the fastest birds in the world.



Status

The Peregrine falcon is considered very rare (S1) provincially by the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre. Peregrine populations dropped significantly throughout North America from the 1940s through the 1970s. By the mid-1970s, populations of the *anatum* subspecies had been virtually wiped out throughout much of North America.

Research showed that Peregrine declines in North America and Europe were related to side-effects from ingesting pesticides such as DDT. Side effects included eggshell thinning and breakage, reduced hatching success and brood sizes, and abnormal behaviour in adult birds that led to nest abandonment. By the early 1970s, use of some of these chemicals was banned in Canada and the United States. This resulted in partial recovery of many nesting populations.

Peregrine falcon was listed as Endangered in 1992 by regulation under Manitoba's *Endangered Species Act*. The *anatum* subspecies was assigned a status of Endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) in 1979, and was downlisted to Threatened in Canada in 1999 based on partial recovery in population numbers. Peregrine falcons are also protected

in Canada under the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act*, and under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which restricts the import and export of individual Peregrine falcons and their eggs.

Stewardship and recovery

In 1987, a national recovery plan was approved to increase Canada's *anatum* Peregrine population to a level where it would no longer be considered Endangered. The release of captive-bred birds has made a significant difference in Peregrine falcon populations. Nest boxes installed on upper ledges of high buildings and skyscrapers have been successful in attracting nesting pairs.

Since 1996, closed circuit video surveillance at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Winnipeg has provided the public with direct contact with the birds. Similar urban nesting programs exist in other major Canadian cities. This has encouraged the public to learn more about the birds and to support recovery efforts.

Get Involved in Recovery

If you see a Peregrine falcon, please contact Manitoba Conservation at one of the numbers below.

**Manitoba Conservation
Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch**
Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent
Winnipeg MB R3J 3W3
(204) 945-7775
www.gov.mb.ca/natres/wildlife/index.htm

Manitoba Conservation Regional Offices

Red River Region
Winnipeg
(204) 948-3262

Western Region
Brandon
(204) 726-6450

Partners in production of this fact sheet:
Manitoba Conservation,
Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch
Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service
Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

Extirpated Species

Any species once native to Manitoba that has disappeared through all of its Manitoba range. Extirpated species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Endangered Species

Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Threatened Species

Any native Manitoba species likely to become endangered or at risk due to low or declining numbers in Manitoba if the factors affecting it don't improve. Threatened species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Vulnerable Species

Species not regulated under the *Endangered Species Act* but which could eventually be considered Endangered or Threatened if the factors affecting them do not improve.