

# Vermont's Wildlife Heritage

## Nongame and Natural Heritage Program

### FACTS ABOUT NONGAME WILDLIFE SPECIES

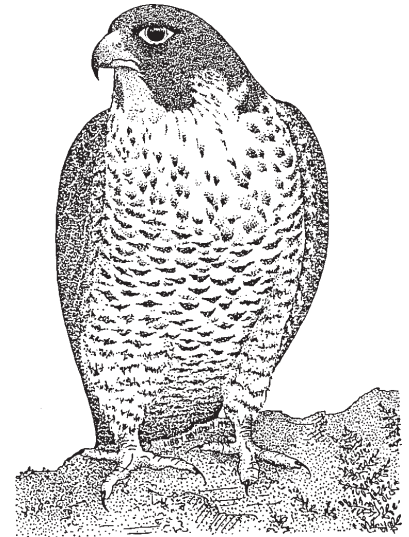
## Peregrine Falcon

### *Falco peregrinus*

Also known as the "duck-hawk" or the "wanderer," the peregrine falcon is a bird of amazing speed and maneuverability. One of the world's swiftest flyers, this bird of prey has made a remarkable recovery from the effects of DDT. Due to the use of this chemical, all the U.S. peregrines east of the Mississippi River were eliminated.

Efforts to reintroduce peregrines have been successful. In Vermont, relatively high peregrine productivity levels have been sustained since 1991. Due to the sensitivity of these birds to disturbance, people are encouraged to remain at least 300 feet from nesting areas during this period.

**Peregrines were removed from Vermont's Endangered and Threatened Species List in April 2005.**



## DESCRIPTION

**L**ong, pointed wings and a medium to long, rounded tail help distinguish the peregrine from other hawks. Peregrines fly swiftly and catch their prey in midair with the help of powerful talons.

Peregrines have dark heads that appear to be hooded with a wide dark stripe or mustache mark that extends down the cheek.

A dark, slate-colored back and white underside, often with black horizontal flecking on the belly, are characteristics of the adult peregrine falcon. The juvenile has a dark brown back, and its underside has dark brown, vertical streaking.

Other characteristics include:

■ **Sounds:** A high pitched wail, a soft "ee-chup," and a prolonged "kek-kek-kek," which signifies danger, are three common peregrine calls.

■ **Size:** Similar in size to the crow, female peregrines weigh about 40 ounces, range from 18 to 19 inches in body length, and have a wingspan of 37 to 39 inches. Males tend to be smaller, weigh about 24 ounces, range in body length from 16 to 18 inches, and have a wingspan of 31 to 35 inches.

■ **Food:** The primary food is other birds which are most often caught in the air.

## HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION

Peregrine falcons prefer to nest on high ledges (called eyries) near open areas where they hunt, such as rivers, lakes, and fields.

The nest is a section of gravel, sand, or loose soil that has been hollowed out. No additional building materials are brought to the site. The female may lay 3 to 4 cream colored eggs, heavily marked with browns.

In winter, most Vermont peregrines migrate south. Some may travel as far as the West Indies, Panama, and Mexico, but most are likely to stay in the U.S.

## REASONS FOR DECLINE

■ DDT was used as an insecticide until banned in the U.S. in the early 1970s. It widely dispersed throughout the environment where it takes years to break down.

Peregrines picked up the chemical from the birds they ate. The result was thinner eggshells and a reduced chance of survival for the young. Since the ban of DDT, eggshells are thicker and more young have hatched.

■ Other circumstances that can negatively affect peregrine falcons include disturbances at nest sites such as predation, human presence, egg collection, and shooting at birds.

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The Nongame and Natural Heritage Program (NNHP) is responsible for managing and enhancing Vermont's native plants, natural communities, and animals that are not hunted or fished (nongame species). A unit within the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, the NNHP's mission includes the preservation of Vermont's rich and varied natural heritage for present and future generations.

## MANAGEMENT EFFORTS

The status of the peregrine falcon concerns many people and organizations, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Federation, Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS), Green Mountain National Forest, The Nature Conservancy, and the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Efforts to assist peregrines include the following:

■ In 1975, the Peregrine Fund, Inc. led the effort to reintroduce the peregrine falcon into Vermont. From 1982 to 1987, young peregrines, born in captivity, were placed in artificial nest boxes and released off a ledge, a process called "hacking."

■ Nesting areas are monitored so that the status of nest sites and the number of young raised can be documented.

■ Leg bands were placed on chicks to assist long-term tracking efforts of peregrines throughout their range.

■ Warning signs are used, and hiking trails may be closed to minimize disturbances during nesting.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

■ Avoid activities within 1/4 mile of nest sites and especially activities above nests during the breeding season (March-July). Honor warning signs when posted.

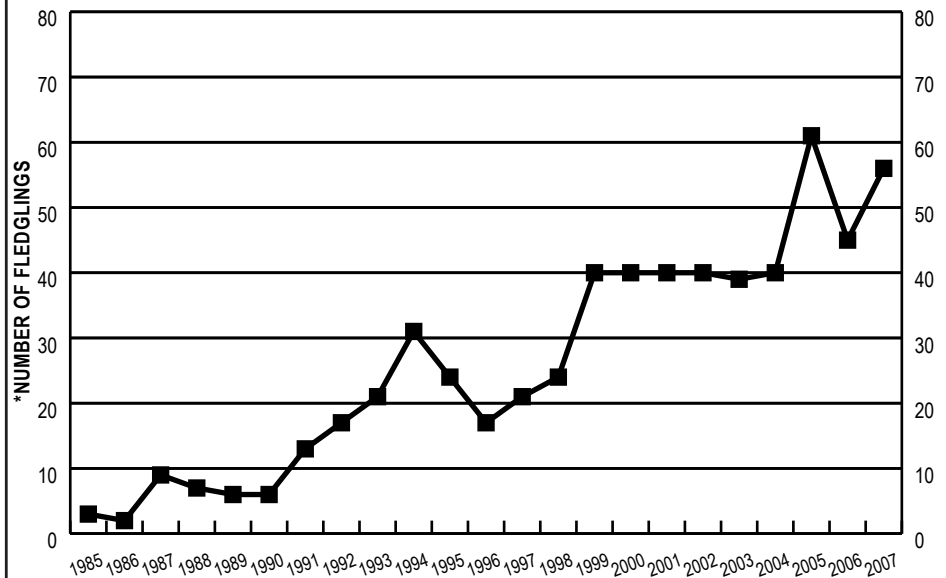
■ Maintain a respectful distance from wild animals. (Travel with binoculars!) If a bird vocalizes when you're near its territory, immediately back off.

■ Observe and report on peregrine sightings and nesting activities in your area.

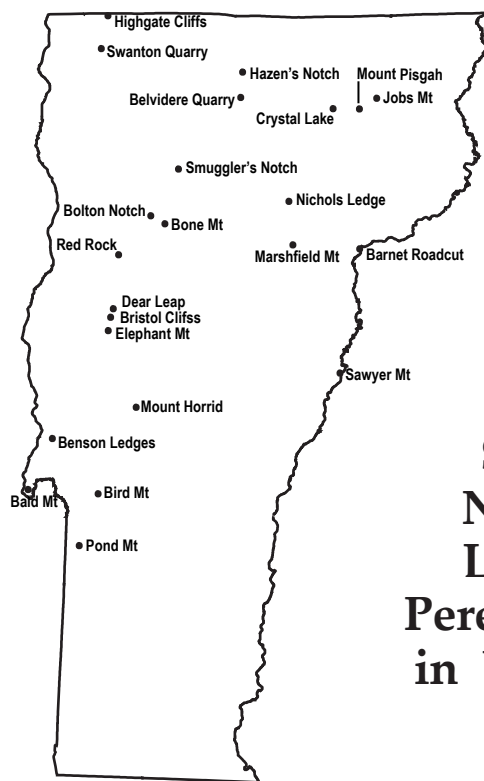
■ Donate any amount to the Nongame Wildlife Fund at the sign of the loon on the Vermont income tax form, on hunting and fishing license applications, or by direct donation (see box).

■ Falconers can practice their sport in Vermont, but it is illegal to take peregrine falcons from the wild in Vermont.

## Peregrine Falcon Breeding Status in Vermont, 1985-2007



\*Number of fledglings indicates the number of chicks that flew from the nest.



## Successful Nesting Site Locations of Peregrine Falcons in Vermont, 2007

Peregrine falcon recovery efforts in Vermont, including this fact sheet, are funded by contributions to the Nongame Wildlife Fund. Created by the legislature in 1986, the fund enables people to voluntarily contribute to programs on behalf of Vermont's nongame species. These tax-deductible gifts are used by the Nongame and Natural Heritage Program to inventory, monitor, and manage species and their habitats and to provide planning assistance and educational programs. Direct gifts are accepted, payable to:

Nongame Wildlife Fund  
Vermont Fish & Wildlife Dept.  
103 S. Main St., Waterbury, VT 05671-0501  
(802) 241-3700

