



PEREGRINE FALCON

Scientific name: *Falco peregrinus*

	Male	Female
Length:	14" - 16"	16" - 18"
Wingspread:	37" - 39"	40" - 46"
Weight:	1 - 1.2 lbs	1.6 - 2.1 lbs

DECLINE OF THE PEREGRINE FALCON

- Peregrine falcons were formerly one of the most widespread birds in the world. Prior to the 1960s, they nested at more than 350 sites east of the Mississippi River, including ~45 in Pennsylvania.
- Long-lived pesticides such as DDT in falcon food accumulated in the birds themselves, causing females to produce thin eggshell that often cracked during incubation.
- Populations crashed throughout much of the world by the 1960s, with no successful nesting east of the Mississippi River by 1965.
- Peregrines were one of the first species listed as Endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1974. They were federally de-listed in 1999.

RECOVERY OF THE PEREGRINE FALCON

- A nationwide recovery program was developed by Dr. Thomas Cade at Cornell University in 1970.
- Young birds were hatched from eggs in captivity and released into the wild. This program grew into The Peregrine Fund and the World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho.
- The Pennsylvania Game Commission is the official regulatory and management agency for this species in the state. The peregrine falcon is listed as a Pennsylvania Endangered species under the state wildlife code because their populations have not fully recovered here.
- In 2003, two peregrine falcon nests were found on cliffs in Pennsylvania, marking the first occasion since 1957 that peregrine falcons have been found in the state nesting outside of cities. Two cliff nests were also documented in 2004 and 2005.

PITTSBURGH PEREGRINE FALCON NEST SITES

- Peregrine falcon pairs have been nesting at the Gulf Tower in downtown Pittsburgh since 1991 and at the University of Pittsburgh Cathedral of Learning since at least 2002. By 2009 at least three additional pairs bred at bridges in the Pittsburgh area.
- The Cathedral of Learning and the Gulf Tower are good nesting sites because of the positive attitude of building management, and because they offer:
 - among the tallest locations in the area (best sites are 20+ stories);
 - a high, secluded ledge with no expansive areas of reflective glass;
 - there is locked, controlled access to an infrequently-used ledge;
 - there is a relatively safe environment for young to take their first flight;

Few birds are as swift: Peregrines dive after prey at speeds approaching 200 mph.





SPECIAL THANKS:

The National Aviary would like to thank project partners: the Gulf Tower, Make-A-Wish Foundation of Greater Pennsylvania and Southern West Virginia, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Robert Peirce & Associates, PC, Cool Beans Coffee Company, and the Pennsylvania Game Commission for their assistance with this project.

NEST BOX CONSTRUCTION

- Nest boxes are custom-made at each site.
- The box is typically about 37" long by 30" wide by 5 3/4" deep. A three-sided shelter (16" deep by 16" high) with a roof is located at one end of the box.
- The bottom of the box is filled with approximately 300 lbs. of "pea" size round gravel upon which the eggs are laid. Peregrines instinctively look for this or similar substrate on which to lay their eggs.

GULF TOWER NEST SITE

- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy established a partnership with the Gulf Tower and the Pennsylvania Game Commission in 1990 to provide a protected nesting site for a pair of peregrine falcons spotted in Pittsburgh.
- The peregrine falcon adult pairs, young, and nest site must be protected from human intrusion during nesting. This protection is provided by the Gulf Tower and the Make-a-Wish Foundation.
- The Gulf Tower was the first known building nest site in Pennsylvania. Many other PA nest sites are on bridges. Buildings are generally more successful locations for peregrines nesting in cities. Since 2002 the number of nest sites has increased in the Pittsburgh area and now includes the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning and up to four bridges.
- The original pair in Pittsburgh wore coded leg bands identifying them as part of the recovery program. The original female was released in the Shenandoah Mountains near the Virginia-West Virginia border in June 1989. The male was released in northeastern Tennessee in June 1989.
- The Gulf Tower nest has fledged a total of 63 young peregrine falcons since the first nesting in 1991.
- Because nesting peregrine falcons are territorial, only one pair will reside in downtown Pittsburgh. The present pair is expected to reside in the city for years to come. Pennsylvania's peregrine falcons are not migratory and remain through the winter.
- Peregrines nesting at the Gulf Tower can be observed on a television monitor at Cool Beans Coffee Company on the first floor of the Gulf Tower, or on the Internet at www.aviary.org, a project supported by Robert Peirce & Associates, P.C. The Pitt nest can also be observed online at www.aviary.org.
- Peregrine falcons hatched at the Gulf Tower have later bred in other cities, including Cleveland, Detroit, and Toronto.

THE LIFE OF A PEREGRINE FALCON

- On average peregrines produce four eggs (range is 3 to 6) in March or early April.
- Incubation lasts 30-32 days and is accomplished largely by the female. The male provides food during this period.
- Peregrine falcons feed almost exclusively on small-to-medium size birds caught in the air.
- Young are fed freshly killed prey by their parents.
- Pigeon control programs that use poison are dangerous to peregrine falcons. Two peregrines died in Baltimore after eating poisoned pigeons.
- Young peregrines are on their own a few weeks after leaving the nest; birds hatched here normally disperse outside of Pittsburgh by summer's end.
- Some peregrine falcons in the wild may reach 17 to 20 years of age.

Questions can be directed to:

*The National Aviary,
412-323-7235*

(Steven Sarro)