



# Peregrine Falcon Fact Sheet

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.

- Peregrine falcons are found on every continent except Antarctica, making them 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 44 sites in Pennsylvania.
- The pesticide DDT accumulated in falcon food and then in falcons. As a result, female falcons produced thin eggshells that often cracked during incubation.
- Populations crashed throughout much of the world by the 1960s, with no successful nestings 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.
- 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.
- The recovery program grew into The Peregrine Fund and the creation of the World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho.
- Peregrines are still a Pennsylvania Endangered Species under the state wildlife code because they have not fully recovered here. The Pennsylvania Game Commission is the official regulatory and management agency for this species.
- Peregrines came to the Cathedral of Learning on their own in the mid-1990's but did not nest successfully until 2002.
- The pair of falcons at the Cathedral of Learning wear coded leg bands identifying them as part of peregrine recovery program. The 2006 male was born on the Rhodes State Office Tower in Columbus, Ohio in 1998 and was named "Erie" by the Ohio Division of Wildlife. The female was born at Firststar Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1999 and named "Dorothy" by Wisconsin Falcon Watch. Both birds flew here on their own.
- "Erie" defended his nest from an invading male in 2007, resulting in the death of the invader. This incident received national press, and was recorded by the web cam, providing fascinating pictures of wild falcon behavior.
- This building is a good nesting site because of the positive attitude of the building management, and because:
  - it is the tallest location in the area (best sites are 20+ stories);
  - it has a high, secluded ledge with no expansive areas of reflective glass;
  - there is locked, controlled access to an infrequently used roof;
  - there is a relatively safe environment for the young to take their first-flight;
  - the adjacent indoor area is not constantly occupied.

- Peregrines must be protected from human intrusion during nesting. Protection is provided by the University by controlling access, and by state and federal Endangered Species laws.
- A custom-made nest box was constructed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission. The box is made of weather-resistant plastic lumber.
- 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 type of substrate on which to lay their eggs.
- 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.
- Few birds are as swift as peregrines which are said to dive at speeds up to 200 mph.
- 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.
- Pittsburgh's peregrine falcons are not migratory and remain through the winter. Other peregrines are migratory, sometimes traveling from Greenland to Argentina and back every year.
- Only one pair resides in Oakland; another pair has bred downtown at the Gulf Tower since 1991.
- Several new pairs have recently arrived in the Pittsburgh area. One is known to nest on the 62<sup>nd</sup> street Bridge in Pittsburgh and another on the Monaca Bridge in Beaver County. Keep your eyes open near other bridges in our area as new nest sites are being found every year!
- In 2007 the National Aviary installed a "falcon cam" at this nest. To see live video of the peregrine family on this building, visit our web site at [www.aviary.org](http://www.aviary.org).

This project is a cooperative effort between the University of Pittsburgh, the National Aviary and the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Questions can be directed to:

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