Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

Pennsylvania Endangered Bird Species
S1B (critically imperiled) G4 (apparently secure)

Identification

A 15- to 22-inch falcon, adults have dark-bluish gray upperparts and wings. Underparts are whitish to buffy colored, broken by horizontal bars. The head has a nearly black "helmet." Like all falcons, the peregrine has long pointed wings and rapid, steady wing beats in flight.

Photo Credit: F.K. Schleicher, VIREO

Biology-Natural History

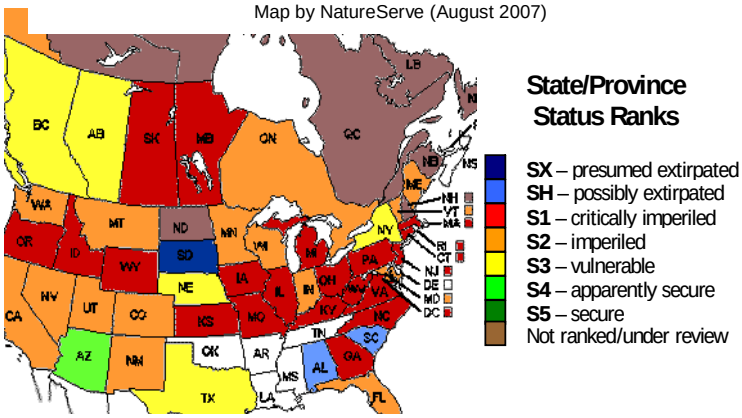
The peregrine nests in many parts of the world. In Pennsylvania, peregrines once nested on high cliffs along the Delaware, Susquehanna and Juniata rivers. Nesting records come from at least 21 counties. They feed primarily on other birds, typically by striking them in flight. A clutch of four eggs is normally laid, and the birds may remain in Pennsylvania the year round.

Habitat

Historically, this falcon nested on high cliffs overlooking river systems. Today, peregrines are more apt to be found nesting on high bridges and tall buildings within cities. As a result, they frequently feed on pigeons and other urban birds. After an absence of 30 years, the return of breeding peregrines to Pennsylvania was first documented on bridges spanning the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers in the Philadelphia area. In 1990, a pair began nesting in Pittsburgh.

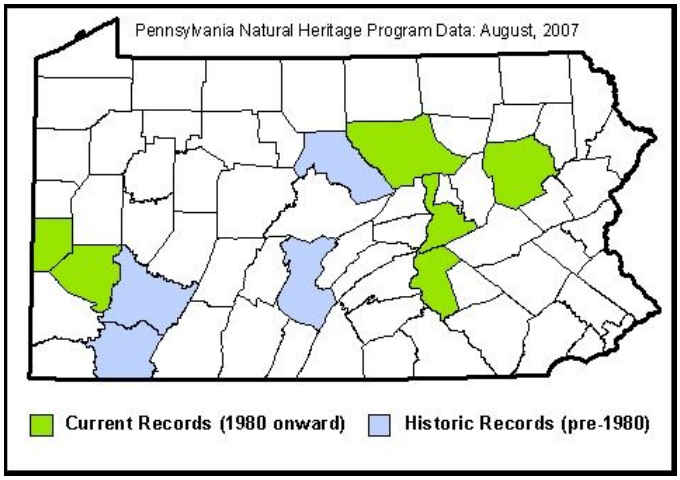
North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe (August 2007)



Reasons for Being Endangered

By 1961, peregrines were no longer found in Pennsylvania. Their decline and extirpation has been attributed to egg collecting, falconry and shooting, but chiefly to pesticides – particularly DDT.



Management Practices

The plan to restore this species includes annual surveys for new nest sites; protection of known nest sites, including hazard reduction to increase survival of young peregrines; restoration of peregrines at suitable historic sites; and promotion of public support. A reintroduction program has released birds in Harrisburg, Reading, and Williamsport.

References:

- NatureServe. 2007. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.2. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available http://www.natureserve.org/explorer. (Accessed: August 21, 2007).

Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

Fact Sheet adapted from: Felbaum, Mitchell, et al. Endangered and Threatened Species of Pennsylvania. Harrisburg, PA: Wild Resource Conservation Fund, 1995.