

ABOUT THE COVER: PEREGRINE FALCON

Perhaps no other bird evinces greater mastery of its environment than the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). Swift of flight, the Peregrine is capable of performing split-second maneuvers in response to the evasive action of prey. For this reason, this species has always been highly prized by falconers.

The Peregrine Falcon was never a common bird in eastern North America. As a predator at the top of the food chain, its overall population was necessarily low. Until the twentieth century the Peregrine was a rare breeding resident. The massive use of pesticides, primarily DDT, in the post-World War II years, caused the rapid extirpation of the species as a breeding resident. The birds disappeared from their remote cliff aeries in the East. A cautious, well-conceived plan of captive breeding was formulated. After DDT was banned, an equally well-planned program of reintroduction was instituted. The success of these procedures to restore the Peregrine as a breeding species is the crowning glory of the state and federal Endangered Species programs and has been well chronicled.

As a result of this effort in Massachusetts, Peregrine Falcons have nested in artificial nest sites in Boston since 1988 and downtown Springfield in 1989 and 1990. Young have been raised to fledging in all nesting attempts. Similar success in other eastern states bodes well for the Peregrine's future.

During the latter half of the sixties and the first half of the seventies, the fate of the Peregrine was at its most precarious. At that time most reports of Peregrine Falcons were strictly coastal with outer Cape Cod and the Newburyport area the predominant locales of the sightings. Only an occasional sighting was reported inland. Beginning in the mid-1980s, sightings of Peregrines increased noticeably. Annual sightings of inland Peregrines rose significantly, and coastal sightings likewise surged. Today record daily totals of migrant Peregrines in fall at favored localities such as Cape May, New Jersey, indicate that the Peregrine population is recovering nicely. The birds recorded in these counts are tundra-breeding Peregrines, a population that, although seriously reduced, was probably never threatened with extirpation. Since its application was banned thirty years ago, the effects of DDT and its insidious metabolite DDE have diminished enough to be no longer a limiting factor in population growth. Similar gains in population of other raptors, most noticeably Osprey and Northern Harrier, are also greatly encouraging.

Although there also has been an increase in winter sightings in the state, with most reports coming from the Boston area, outer Cape Cod, and the offshore islands, the Peregrine Falcon, except for a few resident birds, occurs in Massachusetts mainly as a rare spring migrant between mid-April and mid-May, with reports concentrated in early May. It is now an uncommon migrant in fall from early September to early November with a rather noticeable peak in the

first week of October. The largest concentrations of Peregrines occur on outer Cape Cod and the offshore islands. The frequency of occurrence of Peregrines at Monhegan Island in Maine and Block Island in Rhode Island, coupled with occasional reports of birds landing in riggings of ships at sea, indicate that perhaps the bulk of the migration occurs offshore.

When a Peregrine is encountered inland, it is likely to be seen in soaring flight, Broad-wing fashion, rather than performing a swift dash over a marsh that is typical of this species at coastal locations.

Richard A. Forster

MEET OUR COVER ARTIST

This issue's Peregrine Falcon is the third work to appear on our cover by Paul K. Donahue, ornithologist and artist. Having twice informed our readers of Paul's activities generally (see *Bird Observer* 18 [1]: 69 and 18 [4]: 249), we welcomed the opportunity give him a call in Machias, Maine, to find out for our readers and ourselves what Paul has been up to recently.

Paul continued his explorations of the rain forest canopy in Peru this year, but at a new location, Manu Lodge in Manu National Park, about 250 kilometers northeast of the Tambopata Nature Reserve, his base in previous years. At Manu, Paul has constructed about a dozen wooden platforms in canopy trees. He describes these new platforms as bigger and more comfortable than the metal ones he erected at Tambopata; and although he encourages everyone to climb, he has equipment available for hoisting people aloft. Paul has safely gotten nearly fifty Manu visitors up to his platforms for a canopy experience, which often includes good looks at guans, curassows, and up to five species of monkeys. He now looks forward to the construction of a 1.5-kilometer walkway through the canopy, an undertaking for which he seeks funding.

Since his return to Maine in mid-September, Paul has spent several weeks in another regular annual pursuit, hawkwatching in South Harpswell with George Appell, who has studied hawk migration at this location since 1965 (see "Sociality, Agonistic Interaction, and the Pulse Phenomenon in the Flight Behavior of Falconiformes Along the Maine Coast" by G. N. Appell, *Bird Observer* 6 [6]: 202). George Appell is also the person who commissioned Paul's series of paintings of North American raptors. This fall's count of Peregrine Falcons, seventy as of mid-October, has already set a new high for the site, reports Paul.

The artist will return to Manu in March. As usual, he will spend the winter in Machias painting. Paul's address is P.O. Box 554, Machias, Maine 04654.

H. Christian Floyd