

## BOOK REVIEW

**Collected Papers in Avian Paleontology Honoring the 90th Birthday of Alexander Wetmore. 1976. Storrs L. Olson, ed. Smithsonian Contr. to Paleontology, no. 27, 211 pp.**

There is considerable of interest in this volume for the student of raptors. Most exciting is a paper by O. Arredondo on "The great predatory birds of the Pleistocene of Cuba." Giant fossil Barn Owls (*Tytonidae*) have been known for some time from various West Indian islands. Now we learn that in Cuba at that time there were two such Barn Owls, a vulture as large as the Andean Condor (*Vultur*), an eagle bigger than a Golden Eagle, and, perhaps most remarkable, a strigine owl bigger than any living species; it is thought to have stood about a meter tall! It is most remarkable because the wing bones show that it must have been flightless or nearly so. Apparently some of the mammals that swarmed in the West Indies at that time must have been as clumsy as today's "guinea pigs," a relative of some of them.

Another paper describes the oldest known fossil owl. From the Paleocene of Colorado, it seems to have been somewhat intermediate between the present families Strigidae and Tytonidae. An osprey from the Miocene of California is assigned to a separate species but may have been ancestral to the living one.

Dean Amadon

## BALD EAGLE LITERATURE WANTED

The National Wildlife Federation's Raptor Information Center is creating a computer-based, working (i.e., keyworded) bibliography on the Bald Eagle. An attempt is being made to include all existing literature, both published and unpublished. Information on extant bibliographies and sources of unpublished literature (reports, theses, dissertations, etc.) is especially being sought. If you have pertinent articles that you wish to be included, please send them to: Mr. Bill Clark, Director, Raptor Information Center, National Wildlife Federation, 1412-16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20036. Thank you.

## PEREGRINES BEAT ALL ODDS IN MORRO ROCK STRUGGLE

(News Release, Department of Fish and Game, 9 July 1977)

Somewhere in the air surrounding Morro Rock, a fledgling Peregrine Falcon is learning the "tricks of the trade" from its foster mother.

It may not seem like much, but for biologists at the Department of Fish and Game it is cause for celebration. It is the culmination of an intense but troubled effort to salvage one of only ten active peregrine nesting sites known in the state. The Peregrine Falcon is an endangered species.

"I consider it a great success, because without man's efforts that young peregrine would not be there today," said Robert D. Mallette, associate wildlife manager-biologist and the department's expert on raptors. "And the information we've learned from this operation will help us in our future efforts to increase the peregrine population in California."

Morro Rock in San Luis Obispo County is an ecological reserve, because for years a single pair of Peregrine Falcons has nested on its rocky ledges. The site is so critical that in recent years a human guard has been hired to protect the nesting site

from other human intrusion. The guard was paid with funds from the California Non-game Wildlife Conservation Program.

It was the guard, a young biologist named Merlyn Felton, who first noticed the troubles which would plague this year's nesting attempt. The female peregrine at Morro Rock stopped incubating the egg early in May. No one knew why, but it was assumed the egg had gone bad, and it appeared doubtful a new Peregrine Falcon would fly off Morro Rock this year.

But Mallette decided to try something never attempted on the West Coast before, to plant in the nest peregrine chicks hatched in captivity and allow the adult peregrines to raise them. The young peregrines were from eggs hatched at captive breeding facilities at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

While arrangements were being made to bring the chicks to California, the peregrine nest on Morro Rock was filled with a pair of young Prairie Falcons, which were incubated and fed almost at once by the adult peregrines. The Prairie Falcon is a close relative of the peregrine.

"We put the Prairie Falcons in the nest to try to keep the nesting instincts alive in the adults," Mallette said. When the peregrines were placed in the nest a few days later, the Prairie Falcons were removed and placed with their own kind.

The adult peregrines also readily assumed the care of the two foster peregrine chicks, Mallette said. As is the custom, the female would sit at the nest while the male, also called a tiercel, captured food on the wing and brought it to the nest. The agile peregrine has been clocked at 180 miles per hour while diving on prey.

For about a week it appeared the bird transplant project would be an unqualified success. But within a matter of days two events took place which would once again alter the scope of the attempt to salvage the Morro Rock nesting operation.

First, the adult male disappeared. Then one of the chicks died in the nest. The cause of the death is unknown, but the loss of a chick is not unusual among raptors.

Later, the tiercel was found dead on Morro Rock. Pellets were found in its wings, but the body was so decomposed laboratory technicians have been unable to determine an exact cause of death.

The death of the male Peregrine Falcon presented a difficult problem to Mallette and Felton. If the female had to leave the nest for food, it would leave the remaining chick unprotected at the nest. So a scheme was devised which allowed Felton to assume the role of the food gatherer.

In a blind not far away from the peregrine nest, Felton did his best to imitate the call of the male peregrine coming in with food. The call alerted the female, which customarily meets the male in mid-air for a food exchange. But in this case, Felton merely released a pigeon or other prey species from the blind. It flew by the nest and was quickly snared by the female falcon.

The unorthodox feeding method worked, and the surviving foster chick fledged on schedule about a month after it was hatched more than 3,000 miles away. Felton reports it keeps a close eye on its mother and is learning how to catch prey on its own.

It also appears Felton has been relieved of his duty of providing food for the Peregrine Falcons. On his last visit to the nest, he discovered a new tiercel had somehow found the nesting territory and had taken over the role of the provider.

"We don't have any idea what turned him on to taking the place of the first tiercel, but we're sure happy to see him," Mallette smiled. "We've got a complete family group once again. Next year there will, in all probability, be a mated pair on Morro Rock."