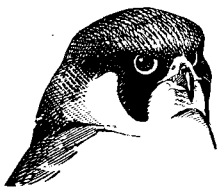

Recovery of California's first captive-produced, wild-fostered Peregrine Falcon

Eric V. Johnson

The Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) which nest on Morro Rock in Morro Bay, San Luis Obispo Co., California, have received considerable attention in the professional and popular press. This account provides a conclusion to the varied events of the 1977 breeding attempt.

The "soap-opera" nature of that season has been summarized in the *Peregrine Fund Newsletter* (1977) and by Thelander (1978). In brief, the falcons' eggs failed to hatch that year, and the adults were "held on" by placing two Prairie Falcon chicks in the eyrie on 12 May. On 21 May these were replaced by two downy Peregrine chicks — a male and a female — provided by Dr. Tom Cade of Cornell University. The chicks had been produced by a pair of southwestern *anatum* Peregrines in Cornell's captive breeding program. The placement of these chicks in a wild eyrie represented the first attempt to supplement California's wild population with captive-produced birds. It was also hoped that, by rearing young successfully, the Peregrines would be encouraged to continue using the Morro Rock nest site.

On 11 June, the two Cornell chicks were banded with standard butt-end bands provided by the Biological Sciences Department of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. No lock-on bands were available at the time. Brian Walton of the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group, who did the actual banding, said that it was his experience that raptors banded as nestlings frequently did not remove butt-end bands.



A few days after the chicks were banded, Merlyn Felton, the guard at the eyrie, noted the disappearance of the adult male. It was later found dead, the apparent victim of a shotgun blast. The adult female subsequently refused to forage out of sight of the eyrie, and the smaller male chick died, presumably of starvation. Its band was not recovered. Felton began tossing pigeons from his blind for the female to catch and feed to the remaining nestling. As a result, the female chick fledged successfully on 23 June. On 4 July, a new adult male appeared, thus reestablishing a pair. The fledgling was observed in the area until early fall, when it stopped frequenting the rock.

On 5 November 1978, more than 16 months after fledging, the juvenile female, still carrying band no. 527-95650, was found dead, bleeding from the mouth, in the Bell Garden River bed in Cudahy, near Downey, California. She had survived for more than a year on her own, and had travelled approximately 200 miles southeastward from Morro Bay. The cause of death is unknown; the three boys who found it removed the bands (USFWS and color) and buried the remains.

This, then, completes the story of the Morro Rock Peregrines for 1977. ☞

Literature cited

- _____. 1977. *The Peregrine Fund Newsletter*. Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. 12pp.
- Thelander, C. 1978. The status of Peregrine Falcons in California — past and present. In *Proceedings of the National Audubon Society Symposium, The Current Status of Peregrine Falcon Populations in North America*. 1978. National Audubon Society Western Education Center, Tiburon, CA. pp. 3-12.

Biological Sciences Dept., California Polytechnic State Univ., San Luis Obispo, CA 93407.