

the young bird, which was apparently full grown. The young follow the parents for weeks begging for food, and are fed.

When first hatched the nestlings are perfectly naked, hideous-looking objects, with their eyes closed. They leave the nest in from fifteen to eighteen days, at which time the tails are quite short, and the feathers not fully developed on any part of the body or wings. Their power of flight is not by any means strong when they first leave the nest, and only short spaces can be covered. Many a young bird at this time of the year falls an easy prey to cats and various snakes. Many meet tragic deaths. A stray cat or dog is a sure target for jays in the neighborhood of a nest, and spirited dives and dashes are made, even sharp thrusts are given the animals, the birds all the while yelling and screaming their loudest.

In three weeks to a month, it is difficult to distinguish the young from the adults, but the face and throat is a smoky, dark color, instead of the rich black of the adult, and the bill is horn-colored, instead of black as in the parents; otherwise the plumage is apparently the same to all outward appearances. By the following spring no difference is seen. Even by fall I can not discern a particle of difference. A fledgling when caught, if caught by anything, emits terrified screeches as if in mortal agony, bringing the parents to its defense at once.

In preparing this article, I forgot to mention, under the caption of "Nesting", a few other facts worthy of note. The approach to the nest may be direct, but more often the bird flies to another part of the tree and gradually works its way to the nest. Both birds assist in nest-building, incubating, and rearing the young. There is practically very little mortality, as the young are quite hardy. Infertility in eggs is infrequent and a high percentage are hatched. I am ashamed to admit that I do not know the exact time required for incubation, but think seventeen days is about right.

ORLANDO, FLA.

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## NESTING OF THE PRAIRIE FALCON IN MONTANA

BY V. L. MARSH

Early Sunday morning, May 13, 1934, Ellsworth D. Lumley, Wm. Reavley, Jr., and I left Great Falls to visit the nest of a pair of Prairie Falcons (*Falco mexicanus*) that had been reported nesting a short distance from the Sun River Park road about one mile from the park and about a quarter of a mile south of the road.



FIG. 5. General environs of the pair of Prairie Falcons. Photographed by V. L. Marsh, July 4, 1934.



FIG. 6. The Prairie Falcon's nesting habitat. Nests of Brewer's Blackbird, Yellow Warbler, and the Western Lark Sparrow were found in the same area. Catbirds and Arctic Towhees could always be flushed from the bushes in the center of the scene.

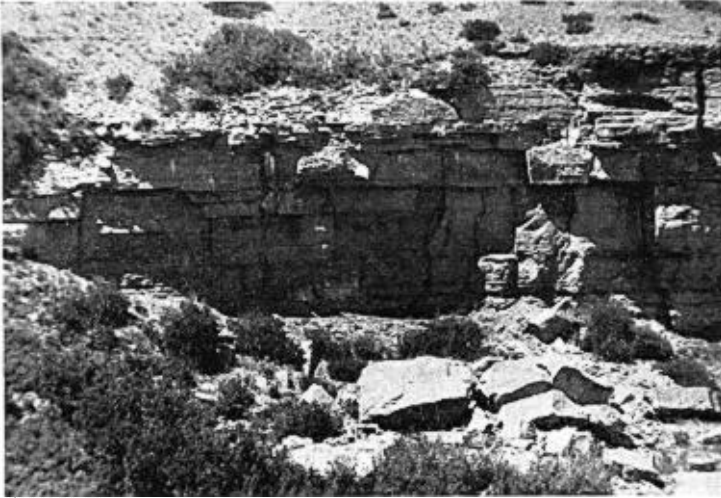


FIG. 7. Closer view of the rock cliffs on which the Prairie Falcons built their nest. Rock Wrens also nested within this area.

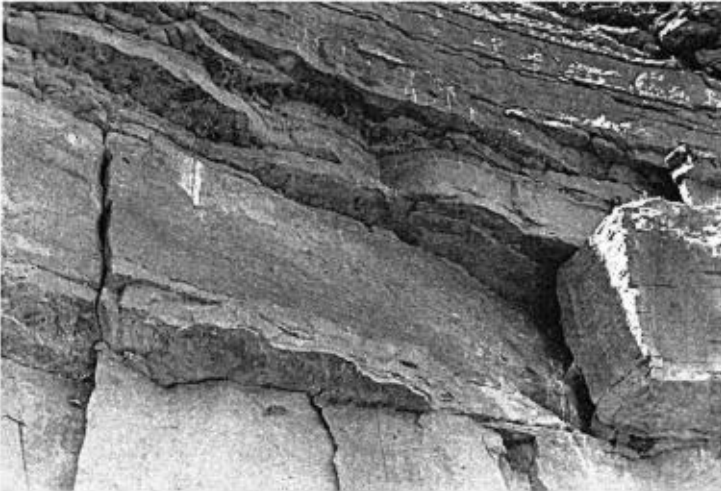


FIG. 8. The Prairie Falcon's nest is in the vertical crevice shown in the lower right hand corner of the picture. Cliff Swallow nests may be seen above.

Arriving at the desired destination, we stepped from the car and scanned the sides of the cliffs and hill to the south with binoculars, but no evidence of a Prairie Falcon could be found. Having brought along some rope, a couple of flashlight bulbs, camera, etc., we assembled our equipment and proceeded up the steep hill to the south. A walk of a quarter of a mile brought us into a deep narrow gorge walled in on three sides by more or less irregular cliffs about fifty feet high. As we entered the mouth of the gulch a shrill scream pierced the air and at the same time a grey streak shot out over the gorge toward us. Presently the second falcon appeared on the scene and from their actions it was plain to be seen that we were treading on forbidden territory. After a few minutes the bluster of protest died down and one of the parent birds sailed up and out over the valley to the north until we lost sight of it in the distance. The other bird perched on the southeast side of the gorge about one hundred yards away and directly opposite the crevice in the west wall of the cliff where the nest was located.

Being the camera man it was up to me to scale the cliff and see what could be done about photographing the nest of young. Lumley and I climbed to a ledge about twelve or fifteen feet below the crevice containing the nest. I scrambled on up and managed to get to the mouth of the crevice. Lumley passed the camera, film holders, and flashlight equipment up from below and in a few minutes all was ready for the picture. Two flashlight pictures were taken. One of them is Fig. 1. When I first looked into the crevice I could see nothing, but in a minute or so my eyes had become accustomed to the darkness and the nest could be easily seen about five feet back from the opening. The nest contained five young Prairie Falcons that I judged to be about two weeks old. At the opening the crevice was about two feet high and sixteen inches wide. It ran back for fifteen or twenty feet and turned out of sight to the left. At the point where it turned out of sight the crevice had narrowed down to six inches wide and twelve inches high. The floor of the crevice was comparatively level though there was a hollow comprising the nest bowl in which the young falcons were closely huddled.

The floor of the crevice was strewn with bones. This same nesting sight has probably been used by Prairie Falcons for many years as was evidenced by the decayed bones and excrement mixture composing most of the covering of the floor of the crevice. Some grass and a few sticks had been brought in for nesting material but there was not much evidence of a well shaped nest. Probably a few twigs

and some grass stems are used to reline the nest hollow each year, but when the young are running about they strew it from one end of the crevice to the other.

An external parasite was working on the little fellows and they were kept busy most of the time scratching and picking themselves much like a dog that is badly infested with fleas.

This was too good an opportunity to pass up so I placed a No. 6 band on each of the five young falcons.\* None of them objected to being banded, but I would not advise anyone to try banding birds of this species when they are much older than these were unless an assistant is at hand.

The parent bird that had been perched across the canyon kept its perch until about the time I reached the mouth of the crevice and at that time it flew very close (probably not more than twenty feet) screaming at the top of its voice. After a few of these dashes it disappeared and we did not see it again until about the time we were ready to leave which was probably about fifteen minutes later.

The nest was visited the second and last time on May 27. The young were walking about in the crevice and were constantly screaming much like their parents as I looked into the mouth of the crevice. Two of the young came running to meet me flapping their wings and uttering a peculiar, harsh caw much like that of a farm-yard hen when she sings to herself. Although the young were still covered with white down the black primary feathers had begun to show on their wings and they would probably leave the nest in about two or three weeks.

During the last visit to the nest the two adult birds kept up a constant screaming and darting here and there about the edge of the cliff. Although they made no attempt to strike at me I did not stay long for, after an experience I once had with a pair of Great Horned Owls nesting on a cliff much like this one, I was in no mood to have a pair of talons sunk into my back when twenty feet up on the side of a rock cliff.

The Prairie Falcon is not a common resident of this district though I see a few birds each year at scattered points over the State.

GREAT FALLS, MONT.

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\*Prairie Falcon B665825 was killed twenty miles west of Polson, Mont., on October 5, 1934.