

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

PEREGRINE FALCON
Family: FALCONIDAE
B129

Falco peregrinus

Order: FALCONIFORMES Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Very uncommon breeding resident, and uncommon as a migrant. Active nesting sites are known along the coast north of Santa Barbara, in the Sierra Nevada, and in other mountains of northern California. In winter, found inland throughout the Central Valley, and occasionally on the Channel Islands. Migrants occur along the coast, and in the western Sierra Nevada in spring and fall. Breeds mostly in woodland, forest, and coastal habitats. Riparian areas and coastal and inland wetlands are important habitats yearlong, especially in nonbreeding seasons. Population has declined drastically in recent years (Thelander 1975,1976); 39 breeding pairs were known in California in 1981 (Monk 1981). Decline associated mostly with DDE contamination. Coastal population apparently reproducing poorly, perhaps because of heavier DDE load received from migrant prey. The State has established 2 ecological reserves to protect nesting sites. A captive rearing program has been established to augment the wild population, and numbers are increasing (Monk 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Swoops from flight onto flying prey, chases in flight, rarely hunts from a perch. Takes a variety of birds up to ducks in size; occasionally takes mammals, insects, and fish. In Utah, Porter and White (1973) reported that 19 nests averaged 5.3 km (3.3 mi) from the nearest foraging marsh, and 12.2 km (7.6 mi) from the nearest marsh over 130 ha (320 ac) in area.

Cover: Requires protected cliffs and ledges for cover.

Reproduction: Breeds near wetlands, lakes, rivers, or other water on high cliffs, banks, dunes, mounds. Nest is a scrape on a depression or ledge in an open site. Will nest on human-made structures, and occasionally uses tree or snag cavities or old nests of other raptors.

Water: Usually breeds and feeds near water; may hunt over water. Reported to bathe frequently.

Pattern: Frequents bodies of water in open areas with cliffs and canyons nearby for cover and nesting.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Resident as a breeder; other individuals breeding farther north migrate into California for the winter.

Home Range: In the Rocky Mts., home range included the area encompassed by a radius up to 23 km (14 mi) from cliff nests. In Sonoma Co., home range was approximately 320 km² (125 mi²), and size fluctuated with prey availability.

Territory: Cade (1960) found a minimum territory of about 96 m (300 ft) radius around nests in Alaska. White and Cade (1971) reported that mean spacing between nests was 9.7 km (6 mi) along Alaska rivers. Inland breeding sites in California varied from 5-12 km (3-7 mi) apart.

Reproduction: Breeds early March to late August. Clutch size 3-7 eggs, usually 3-4. Incubates about 32 days; young semialtricial. Nesting success in a healthy population ranged from 47-80%; successful pairs fledged 2.2 to 2.5 young (Monk 1981). A second clutch may be laid if eggs are destroyed or removed early in the breeding season.

Niche: Occurs worldwide, in cosmopolitan distribution pattern in a wide variety of habitats. Individuals often wander. Golden eagles, great horned owls, raccoons and other mammals may prey on young. May compete with ravens and prairie falcons for nest site.

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