

RESTORATION OF PEREGRINE FALCONS
TO WISCONSIN - 1989

by Charlene M. Gieck

SUMMARY

Only one pair of adult peregrine falcons returned to the Mississippi River historical nest sites. This pair disappeared suddenly in May. Plucked feathers from the adult male were found below the nest cliff. It appears that predation is the cause of death for the male; the female probably abandoned the site after his death.

Nine peregrine chicks were received for release in Madison. One bird died, two have disappeared, and six remain flying. A single peregrine was seen in Madison during the spring, but it does not appear to have remained in the area. The Madison hack site attendants report is attached.

The male from the 1988 pair returned to the Milwaukee hack/nest box. He attracted a one-year old female, from Isle Royale, and three eggs were produced. Only one egg hatched and a captive-raised chick was later added to the nest. The behavior of both adults was normal this year and both chicks fledged the nest. Unfortunately, the wild-produced young (female) was found dead in October - the cause unknown. The Milwaukee site attendant report is attached.

The program has again attracted much attention from the general public and has proven to be a good educational mechanism.

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Study 212: RESTORATION OF PEREGRINE FALCONS TO WISCONSIN

PERFORMANCE REPORT
1 July 1988 to 30 June 1989

SUMMARY

Only one pair of adult peregrines returned to the Mississippi River historical nest sites. This pair disappeared suddenly in May. Plucked feathers from the adult male were found below the nest cliff. It appears that predation is the cause of death for the male; the female probably abandoned the site after his death.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

A stable and long-term funding source is desperately needed. The 1989 releases were made possible only from last minute funding by Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid. The outlook for 1990 is again grim, with only \$6,800 allotted from the Endangered Resources Fund for purchase of chicks and management.

It is unlikely that peregrines will be able to establish themselves in their historic nesting sites without adequate funding for management and protection.

The focus for release sites has been to use cities. These release sites are safer from predators, but other problems can occur. The choice for future release sites is very slim - there are few tall (over 10 story) buildings in Wisconsin. The amount of liability coverage is always a long discussed issue before building owners allow us on the roof or ledge. Research should be conducted to determine the feasibility of establishing a tower release site in Wisconsin.

The release of peregrine chicks have been occurring at a rate of less than 75% of that recommended by the Recovery Plan (1987: 70%, 1988: 40% and 1989: 50%). Strong consideration should be given to additional releases past 1991.

Job 212.1 COORDINATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PEREGRINE
FALCON RECOVERY PLAN

Objective:

To coordinate the activities required for recovery of peregrine falcons in Wisconsin.

Procedures:

The activities are outlined and described in the Wisconsin Peregrine Falcon Recovery Plan (Gieck 1987).

Findings:

The many activities needed to recover a species necessitate having one person oversee these activities to ensure their progress and completion. Charlene M. Gieck, Nongame Biologist, continued as the Peregrine Project Coordinator and has supervised and/or completed the following actions.

A state Recovery Team was formed in May 1988 with Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff and outside experts. The Team is an advisory group and is responsible to 1) assist with implementation of the Recovery Plan, 2) address issues relating to predator control and 3) determine issues and actions relative to the management of peregrine falcons.

The December Recovery Team meeting produced the following approved recommendations: 1) allow the Milwaukee pair to proceed without human intervention. Eggs would not be removed from this nest to encourage the production of a second clutch of eggs; 2) prepare the Madison site as the major release site; 3) prepare a LaCrosse site as an alternate release site; 4) conduct management at the Mississippi nest sites including establishment of predator barriers, trapping and removal of predators and installation of signs to limit access to the bluffs. Vegetation removal and egg removal will not be conducted.

An informal newsletter, Peregrine Panorama, was printed and distributed to keep DNR staff and other interested persons informed of the status of the program. The mailing list contains approximately 240 people. Copies of the newsletters are attached.

Gieck attended the Regional Peregrine Symposium in Minnesota in April. Representatives from Midwest States gave reports on the status of their programs and goals were reaffirmed. Problems and ideas about peregrine projects were shared.

The Milwaukee release/nest site was chaotic during the summer of 1988. The unexpected arrival of two one-year old peregrines in Milwaukee was overshadowed by the even more unexpected production of two young. There had been no record of one-year old peregrines successfully producing young prior to this pair. Two captive raised young were added to the nest.

The parents were able to feed all the young and accepted the new arrivals as their own. The subadult male was a protective father and fed the young while they were perched, but would then attack them when they were in flight. One young died as it collided with a building, one was injured but released in Omaha and another was injured and died due to injuries. Only one of the young survived and remained in Milwaukee.

In preparation for 1989, legal agreements for the use of the box on the First Wisconsin Building were drafted and approved. A wall display and monitoring camera were installed in the building.

Throughout the winter two adults and an immature peregrine were seen in Milwaukee. In April "McArthur" and "Sibella" were in and out of the release/nest box on the First Wisconsin Center. McArthur is the male from last years pair. Sibella was another one-year old female released from Isle Royale in 1988. On May 6 the first of three eggs were laid. Only one egg hatched on June 12. On June 19 a captive raised young was added to the nest.

A site attendant was hired to watch the development of young and behavior of the adults. We hoped that the adult male would not repeat his behavior of last year.

Contaminant monitoring funding was not available to monitor problems that may exist in the peregrine's prey. The two unhatched eggs from the Milwaukee pair will be analyzed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this fall.

Updates of the program's progress were given to the media on an ongoing basis. Several talks detailing the program were given by Gieck to interest groups. The Fond du Lac County Audubon Society were especially active in promoting the project by selling peregrine T-shirts.

Volunteers were given certificates as a thank you for their involvement and time.

Job 212.2 PREPARE SITE-MANAGEMENT PLANS

Objective:

To prepare specific site-management plans for natural nest site locations.

Procedure:

Activity 1.2 as outlined and described in the Wisconsin Peregrine Falcon Recovery Plan (Gieck 1987).

Concise information sheets have been developed by the Eastern Peregrine Falcon Recovery Team for territories using a standardized format. These information sheets facilitate identification of future management needs on an individual territory basis. A ground check of each territory is required and the following information recorded:

1. Habitat type, prey availability, natural predators.
2. Identificaiton of all roads, trails, and dwellings.
3. Recommendations to reduce disturbance factors.
4. Reproductive history.

Findings:

Site mangement plans were slated for for the Alma and Maiden Rock sites - two active nest sites between 1986-89.

A Mississippi River site management plan was obtained from Minnesota. Many of their management guidelines are suitable for the Wisconsin habitat on the Mississippi River and were incorporated into the Wisconsin plans.

Dr. Redig and associates surveyed and characterized the Mississippi River historical nest sites in 1975 using Eastern Recovery Team format. This information is basically the same and used in the management plans.

Both the Alma and Maiden Rock management plans are in draft form. Additional information is still being collected from other sources to be included in the plan. A final draft will be reviewed by the Wisconsin Recovery Team and other experts.

All specific location information will remain confidential.

Job 212.3 MANAGE NATURAL NEST SITES

Objective:

To survey historic sites for returning adults and provide management at nest sites to promote successful reproduction by peregrine falcons.

Procedures:

Activities 1.1 and 1.2 as outlined and described in the Wisconsin Peregrine Falcon Recovery Plan (Gieck 1987).

Findings:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has cooperated with the DNR to determine ownership of the historic sites. TNC hired a Registry Program intern for the summer to visit the sites and discuss management with the landowner. By joining the Registry Program, the landowner verbally agrees to protect the land and to notify TNC if changes occur. Usage of surrounding lands should be further researched.

A breeding survey of historic peregrine eyries was conducted with the help of the Minnesota and Wisconsin Falconers Associations and other volunteers. The survey occurred on April 22 and concentrated on the Mississippi River area. One pair of peregrines was located on Wisconsin side of the Mississippi River north of La Crosse. A single male peregrine was seen at a bluff on the Minnesota side. Other observations by the general public were investigated when appropriate.

