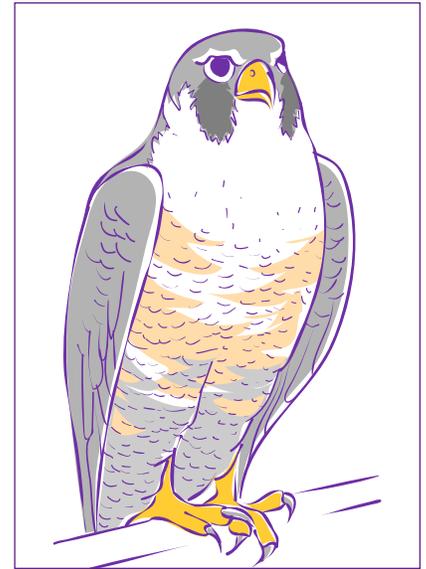
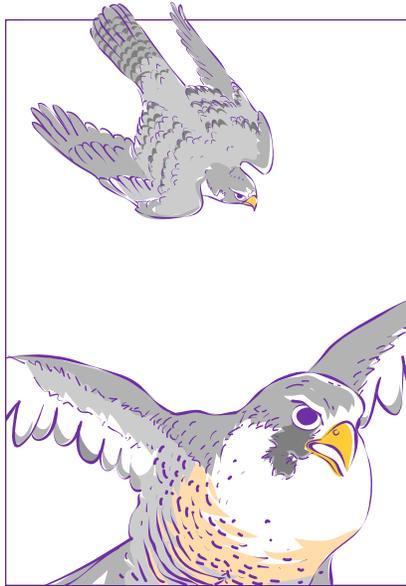


Life of a Peregrine Falcon

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT NATURE'S FASTEST BIRD?

PAGE 1



FLYING MACHINE

Peregrine falcons are nature's fastest flying machine. In level flight they can go 60 miles an hour. But in a dive, peregrines can hit 220 miles an hour.

Peregrines are predators, animals that kill and eat other animals. Peregrines are also known as raptors. They use their speed to kill other birds and knock them out of the air, carrying them off in their strong claws, or talons. The animals that become dinner are called prey. A peregrine's favorite prey includes birds such as pigeons, starlings, blackbirds, ducks, flickers and doves.

NOBLE HISTORY

Humans have long admired peregrines and other falcons for their speed and skill. The birds are so good at hunting that people have used them for that purpose. In Ancient Egypt and in Europe during the Middle Ages, kings and nobles kept falcons for hunting. The kind of falcon a person kept was sign of rank. In the Middle Ages, for example, a king hunted with a gyrfalcon (JUHR-fal-kun). An earl kept the mighty peregrine. A priest could have a sparrow hawk.

The name peregrine means "pilgrim," or "one who wanders." Peregrines sometimes wander miles to find food. The Ojibway people of Minnesota have another name for this beautiful bird: gekek (gay-CAKE).

FALCON FINERY

Adult female peregrines are about a third larger than the males, or tiercels (TEAR-suhls). An adult female might weigh around 35 ounces, or a little more than 2 pounds. Her mate might weigh around 22 ounces. The females are not only bigger, they are stronger.

Male and female peregrines, like other birds of prey, are the same color. They have dark blue-gray wings and backs marked with black bars. Their undersides are light, with black speckles and a touch of salmon. They have a black stripe under each eye.

In contrast, male and female songbirds are colored differently. A male goldfinch, for example, wears brighter, flashier feathers than the female. A female songbird has dull markings to hide her when she is nesting and protecting young.

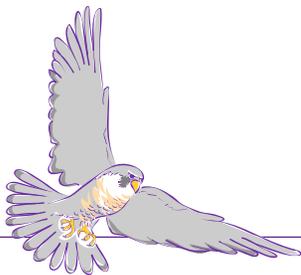
Life of a Peregrine Falcon

MOM AND DAD

Peregrines like to make their nests, or scrapes, on cliffs and in other high, stony spots. Some energy companies, like Xcel Energy, have installed platforms on their power plant smokestacks, to provide a nesting area for the falcons. The female hollows out a spot for her eggs in the pile of stones and pebbles that make up her scrape. The small stones keep the eggs from rolling out of the nest.

The female begins laying eggs every spring in March or April. Usually there are anywhere from three to five in a clutch, or group. It takes up to six days for all the eggs to be laid.

The parents take turns sitting on the eggs to incubate, or warm them. While the female is busy laying eggs, the male will hunt and bring her prey to eat.



GROWING UP ON FALCON CAM

The life of one peregrine family – from hatching to eating – is being caught on camera at the Alan S. King Plant in Bayport, Minnesota. From the end of March into June, pictures taken by a camera near a nest box



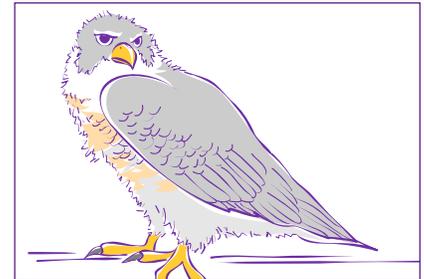
FUZZY BABIES TO AWKWARD TEENAGERS

When an egg has incubated for 31 days, the peregrine chick inside is strong enough to break out. It batters a hole in the shell with the hooked tip of its beak, or egg tooth. When the chick first starts to break out, it is said to be pipping. The chick takes about 48 hours more to get out of its shell completely.

New falcon babies are wet and exhausted when they hatch. They also are nearly naked. Their parents take great care to keep the tiny, helpless newborns warm as their down, or baby fuzz, dries. While they are in the nest, falcon babies are called eyases (EYE-uh-suhs.) Keeping the hungry chicks fed is nearly a full-time job. The babies never seem to get enough.

show up every 15 minutes on Xcel Energy's Web site: www.xcelenergy.com

People from Tel Aviv, Tucson and Tokyo go online to watch eggs hatch and the babies grow on Xcel Energy's Bird Cam.



Mom and Dad take turns hunting for the babies. The parent left behind baby-sits the brood while they wait for the next meal. When a meal arrives, the parent tears bite-sized chunks off for each hungry mouth. All the babies open their beaks wide and beg wildly, hoping to be fed first.

Usually the first chick to hatch is the biggest and strongest, getting the most food. Sometimes, the last hatched is weak and gets cheated out of its share. It might not live to grow up.

Peregrine chicks start learning about being grown up through play. The babies push and shove each other, especially when Mom or Dad brings food. This helps the babies develop skills they will need as adults.

By May, the babies' fuzzy bodies start sprouting adult feathers. With tufts of fuzz mixed in with new feathers, each baby looks like an awkward teenager wanting to be a grown-up.

Late in May, the peregrine teenagers start standing at the edge of their nesting platform, flapping their wings and jumping up and down. This exercise prepares them for their first flight, which will take place about 40 days after they hatch.

Life of a Peregrine Falcon



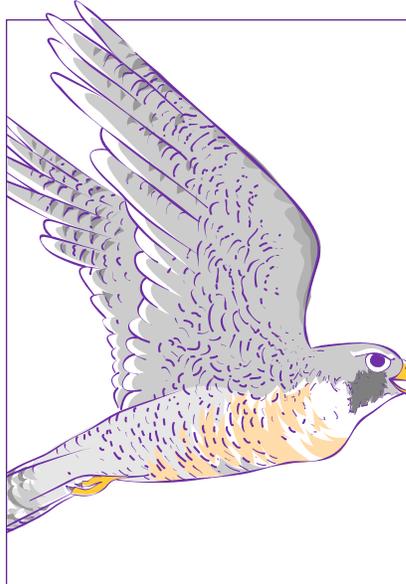
BANDING THE BABIES

Before the first flight, environmental scientists climb up the plant stack to catch them. The scientists want to take blood samples, weigh the birds and check their health.

The mother does not appreciate having people near the nest. She will scream at the scientists and dive-bomb their heads. The scientists catch her in a net, and cover the peregrine's head to calm her while they check her over.

Other scientists examine the babies and put numbered ID bracelets on their legs. This is called banding. The bands will make it possible to track each falcon as it grows, migrates and returns to its territory.

By the end of the day, scientists have checked and banded each baby and returned it to the nest. Then they release the mother, who seems none the worse for wear.



LEARNING TO FLY

Spring turns to summer, and the peregrine chicks are ready to fledge, or leave the nest. But to leave home, they first must learn to fly. They start their lessons by jumping off the edge of the platform.

As the parents watch nervously, each baby flaps its wings and jumps. It looks more like a tumble than a flight, but each young bird knows instinctively what to do. It opens its wings to catch the air and break the fall.

Occasionally, a baby falcon goes spiraling to the ground or onto the power plant roof. If this happens, a scientist will pick it up and return it to the nest. Despite falls of several hundred feet, peregrine babies grow into skilled and speedy flyers over the summer. Once they have left the nest, they are known as fledglings.



ALL GROWN UP

All summer, the brood flies with Mom and Dad, learning to hunt. Their parents demonstrate swooping and diving. Over and over, they show the young peregrines how to catch prey in midair.

The fledglings try to imitate their parents' aerial acrobatics. They are clumsy at first. But by August, each young bird has learned to swoop, dive, and barrel roll at 200 miles an hour. More important, they have learned to catch their own lunches.

By September, the young peregrines look more like their parents, except for their color. They have more brown in their feathers than their parents.

In the autumn, the young falcons will leave Minnesota and fly to open water in Missouri. There they will hang out with their friends all winter, hunting and perfecting their skills. In spring, they will fly back to Minnesota.

When they are two years old, the peregrines will mate and establish families of their own in nest boxes on power plants and buildings in the area.