



Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

 tourism.oregonstate.edu/peregrine-falcon-falco-peregrinus/

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The great wanderer

The word “peregrine” means wanderer or pilgrim. Peregrine is a perfect name for this falcon that lives on several oceanic islands and every continent except Antarctica.

Humans and Peregrine falcons have history. Humans have trained falcons as a hunting partners for thousands of years.

This knowledge and experience became critical between 1950-1970 when populations were wiped out by DDT poisoning. Populations in captivity and handling techniques were used to help re-establish populations and save this species.



Peregrine Falcon (Photo courtesy of ODFW)

After significant recovery efforts, Peregrine Falcon populations have rebounded with an estimated global breeding population of around 140,000. They are now regularly seen in many large cities and coastal areas, reside in Oregon, and the species was removed from the Endangered Species List in 1999.

Super Bird

Peregrine falcons have such amazing skills they dwarf comic book super heros. To start with they are, without a doubt, the fastest bird alive.

SPEED: General traveling flight is only around 25-34 mph, In pursuit, these numbers dramatically change to nearly 69 mph, with spectacular skydives reaching speeds of 240 mph.

These skydives, called stoops, begin 300–3,000 feet above their prey. The falcon tucks its pointy wings tightly to the body to maximize speed. It then either strikes or grabs the prey hard enough to stun or kill.



Peregrine falcon hunting (royalty free Unsplash)

HUNTING TECHNIQUES: Other hunting techniques include selecting birds out of a large flock, level pursuit, and ground hunting. If you see a sudden eruption of a peaceful flock, a Peregrine is most likely nearby. Some of the flock may be trying to mob the Peregrine and drive it off.

FLEXIBLE DIET: Prey predominantly includes primarily birds, but can include bats, rodents, fish and prey pirated from other raptors. Falcons consume over 450 North American species. Worldwide diet choices can run upward of 2,000 choices worldwide.

This can include birds ranging from a large Sandhill Crane to a tiny hummingbird. More typical prey species include shorebirds, ptarmigan, ducks, gulls, pigeons, and songbirds.

FEW PREDATORS: Predators include eagles, Great Horned owls, Gyrfalcons, and other peregrines.

SHARED CHARACTERISTICS: All falcons have some shared characteristics that includes: a conspicuously toothed and notched bill, a nasal cone, and pointed wings which may span over 44 inches.

Nesting

It is not unusual to find a 24/7 camera poised on a Peregrine falcon nest perched on a tall building in the city. Peregrines will perch and nest on any open tall structure such as a skyscraper, water tower, power structures, bridges, rim of the Grand Canyon, in trees on steep slopes, and more.

They typically create a nest about one-third down the cliff face anywhere from 25 to 1,300 feet high. The nest itself is pretty minimal 'scrape' about nine inches across and two inches deep.

In a pinch, falcons will select abandoned nests created by other birds such as, Bald Eagles, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk.

Superstar Chicks

At birth, this baby is entirely helpless with closed eyes. Yet, the tiny falcon chick will work up to 36 hours to peck free of its shell. This amazingly, difficult process has been the focus of many morning falcon-cam programs.

Juveniles have many vertical bars on their breasts. Adults also have the barred under breast, with blue-gray feathers above and a dark head with thick sideburns. This barred look is standard across all ages and geographic variation.

Where to find them

Peregrines inhabit open landscapes from tundra to deserts when not nesting. Areas include coastlines, barrier islands, lake edges, mudflats, and cliff sides. They may also be found near concentrations of prey, such as Rock Pigeons.

Peregrines in the Arctic tundra will migrate to South America earning their high mileage discount by covering as much as 15,500 miles in one year. Their sharp homing instinct will lead them back to favored nesting spots which may have been in continuous use for hundreds of years, by successive falcon generations.

JUST FOR FUN! Take an amazing virtual ride on the back of a trained falcon named Genghis at <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/p/peregrine-falcon/>

REFERENCES:

–Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, raptors (<https://myodfw.com/wildlife-viewing/species/raptors>)

–All About Birds, Cornell

(https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Peregrine_Falcon/lifehistory)