



Photo By: Trisha Snider

Peregrine Falcon (PEFA)

(Falco peregrinus anatum/tundrius)

Description

Peregrine Falcons are one of the fastest birds in the world (record speeds of up to 300 km/h). They are crow-sized (~36–58 cm long) falcons with long, powerful, pointed wings and a long, barred tail; when closed, the wingtips reach the tail tip. They have dark blueish gray upperparts, paler underparts, a yellow hooked bill with a black tip, and yellow feet. They have a characteristic black facial stripe under each eye that looks like a thick mustache or sideburns, especially when contrasted with their white cheeks. They have a white breast, barred belly, and uniform barring under the wing. Males and females are not distinguishable by plumage, but females are 15–20% larger than males. Juvenile plumage is similar to adult, except they have a brown face and upperparts and light brownish yellow underparts. Hatchlings have a pinkish bill and their feet are covered in white down (see picture below).



Coastal



COSEWIC Ranking:
Not at Risk



NL Designation:
Vulnerable



Falcons and Caracaras

Known and potential breeding habitat

Peregrine Falcons nest on cliff ledges on the coast or along rivers. In Newfoundland, breeding evidence has been observed from 1 May until 25 September. While most known nests are in Labrador, evidence of probable breeding has been observed off the coast of the Great Northern Peninsula (Bell Island) and at Bonavista.

Detection Tips

Habitat

Peregrine Falcons are found in a variety of habitats, from urban areas, to prairies, tundra, and coastlines. In Newfoundland and Labrador, they are most commonly found nesting on cliff edges along the coastline or inland river systems. Typical breeding habitats require a cliff edge for nesting and open habitat with sufficient prey for foraging. At coastal sites, the primary prey are seabirds, while at inland sites the primary prey are mammals. They often return to the same nest sites each year to breed.

Vocalization

Peregrine Falcons vocalize the most during the breeding season, as well as during aggressive encounters with other falcons or species any time of year. When defending their nest (called an eyrie), both males and females make a series of loud, relatively short “cack” vocalizations that are often repeated incessantly. During mating, males will make a chitter:

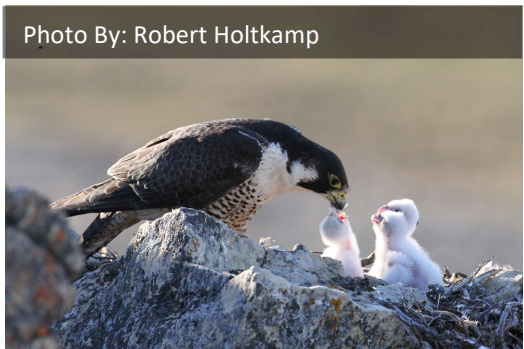


Photo By: Robert Holtkamp



Photo By: Lucas Berrigan

“chi chi chi” in bursts of a dozen repetitions.

Behaviour

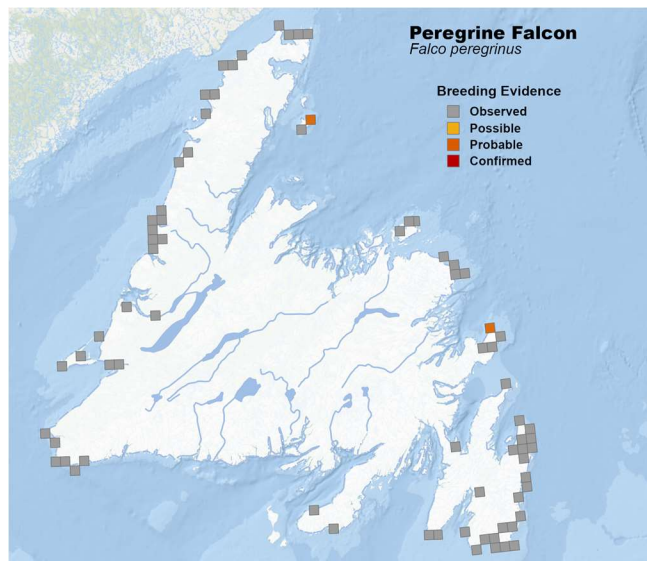
Peregrine Falcons are monogamous and may mate for life. Males display at the nest edge to attract a mate or signal site ownership. Both males and females make ledge displays, which involve head bows and fancy footwork while making vocalizations. They also do aerial displays by rolling in the air. Another courtship display occurs when a male transfers food to a female in flight or on the ground. Peregrine Falcons hunt from high perches or by soaring high in the sky searching for prey. After spotting prey, they make a spectacular dive, striking the prey out of the air. They also chase prey with powerful, steady wingbeats. They defend their nest and will grapple with each other in the air or on the ground.

Nesting

Eyries are created by males scraping one or more bowls into the substrate on cliff faces between 8 to 400 m above the ground (avg: 50–200 m). Females choose a scrape and lay 2–5 brownish eggs with reddish blotches. Both parents incubate the eggs. At first, females do the majority of incubation while the male brings food to the nest; later, both parents bring food for the young. At least one adult is on the ledge most of the time while chicks are in the nest.

Breeding Evidence

Typical breeding evidence for Peregrine Falcons includes the observation of individuals (H) or pairs (P) in suitable nesting habitat, courtship display (D), agitated behaviour (A), fledged young (FY), adult leaving or entering a nest site (AE), dive-bombing near a probable nest site (DD), and nest with young seen or heard (NY). Use adults carrying food (CF) only when you know they are bringing it straight to a nest, as adults will carry food long distances to consume on their own, not necessarily indicating breeding. Invalid codes include nest building (NB), and adults carrying fecal sacs (FS) as they do not fit the biology of this species.



Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus anatum/tundrius*) were detected in 73 squares in Newfoundland in the past ten years (2011-2021). Breeding was confirmed in 0 squares and was probable in 2 during this time.