

1990

Peregrine Falcon Investigations

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PERFORMANCE REPORT

STATE: VIRGINIA PROJECT NO.: EW-2-2
PROJECT TYPE: Research and/or Inventory STUDY NO.: IV
PROJECT TITLE: NONGAME AND ENDANGERED SPECIES INVESTIGATIONS JOB NO.: IV - A-D
STUDY TITLE: PEREGRINE FALCON INVESTIGATIONS
JOB TITLE: PEREGRINE FALCON STUDIES
PERIOD COVERED: July 1, 1989 - June 1990

SUMMARY:

Six pairs of peregrines produced eggs at Tidewater sites. Five pairs were successful and produced 16 young. Two of these young were removed from a ship in the James River moth ball fleet. One was fostered successfully to a pair in Maryland and the second was successfully released at a hack site in Amherst County, Virginia.

Twenty two of 27 birds released at hack sites apparently have been successful.

Cliff site monitoring in the mountains was begun and new cliff sites evaluated as potential hack sites.

JOB IV-A

OBJECTIVE: To census migrant peregrines in the fall and to locate wintering birds.

Fall Migration

Two stations to monitor peregrine falcon and other raptor movements during the fall migration were operated at Fisherman Island and Wise Point. These stations were operated for 151 man days during the months of September, October and November. A total of 167 peregrine falcons was sighted during the period. In general, 1989 was an excellent year for migrating peregrines.

Wintering Populations

Peregrine falcons were observed in increasing numbers at a number of sites. In addition to the expected birds on the barrier islands at towers, peregrines were observed at a number of other Eastern Shore sites, Craney Island, Back Bay, James River Bridge, Benjamin Harrison Bridge, downtown Norfolk, Harrisonburg, and Shenandoah National Park. One of the more interesting observations

was of that of a female peregrine falcon released in Shenandoah National Park during the summer of 1989. This bird, identifiable, by its color band number, was sighted during the winter at Mason Neck and then subsequently sighted at Shenandoah Park in the spring. All known and potential nesting sites in Tidewater Virginia were monitored for the presence of nesting birds.

JOB IV-B

OBJECTIVE: To introduce captive-reared peregrine falcons at mountain hack sites as recommended by the Eastern Peregrine Falcon Recovery Team.

Four peregrine falcon hacking sites were operated in the mountains of Virginia in the summer of 1990. One site was located at Hawksbill Mountain, Shenandoah National Park, Page County - one site was located at Cole Mountain in Amherst County. Two releases were made at High Knob in Rockingham County.

Cole Mountain

Seven falcons were released at Cole Mountain. Three birds, two males and a female, subsequent to release, were flushed prematurely by a malfunction of the food chute. The two males returned to the site but the female never returned. The following day, two other females flew without provocation and did not return to the site. The remaining four birds developed normally and dispersed at the appropriate time.

In addition to this initial group of birds, a male which hatched at a nest site on a ship in the James River mothball fleet was hacked with the captive-reared group at this site. This bird dispersed successfully with the four captive-reared individuals from the site.

Hawksbill Mountain

A total of eight captive reared birds were placed at the Hawksbill site. Because of age differences, two groups of four birds each were placed at the site in different hack boxes. Releases of the two groups were made about 10 days apart.

At the time of the first release, a raccoon prematurely flushed the first four birds from the cliff, resulting in the loss of one bird. At the second release of four birds, one bird fell from the cliff but was subsequently recovered. All remaining seven birds did well but have not dispersed from the site at this time.

In addition to the eight young birds released at the site, a subadult female from the 1989 release was reintroduced to the site. This bird had been injured following dispersal in 1989 and subsequently was rehabilitated at the Peregrine Fund facilities in

Boise, Idaho. This bird adapted well to the cliff site at Hawksbill and presently is using the area with the young bird.

High Knob

The High Knob site was utilized for two consecutive falcon releases. The first group of falcons consisted of seven individuals. On the night of the release, one male disappeared from the site. Extensive searching failed to locate this individual. It subsequently was found dead two weeks later at Virginia Beach, a remarkable flight of 200 miles. The remaining six birds did well and have started to disperse from the site.

A second group of four falcons was placed at the site in early July. One male disappeared after having been on the wing for several days. The remaining three birds are flying very well but have not dispersed from the site at this time.

Subadult peregrine falcons appeared during the hacking process at each of the sites.

Eastern Population

The established population of peregrines in Tidewater Virginia was monitored for nesting success. Pairs were at former hacking towers at Fisherman, Cobb, Metomkin, Wallops, Assateague, and Great Fox Islands. Females at all of these towers laid eggs with the exception of Wallops Island. In addition to these birds, other pairs were located on the Coast Guard Tower at Hog Island and the York River Bridge. Single birds were observed at the Rappahannock River Bridge and at Plum Tree Island. Reports of pairs at the James River Bridge and the Sovran Bank Building were not confirmed although single individuals were seen at both sites. A pair also nested on a ship in the James River Reserve Fleet in the James River.

Pairs at Wallops Island, Hog Island, and the York River Bridge apparently did not lay eggs. The pair at Cobb Island produced eggs which failed to hatch for the fourth year in a row.

Successful pairs produced young as follows:

| | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| James River Fleet | - 5 young |
| Fisherman Island | - 4 young |
| Metomkin Island | - 3 young |
| Great Fox Island | - 3 young |
| Assateague Island | - 1 young |

| | |
|-------|-----------------|
| Total | <u>16 young</u> |
|-------|-----------------|

Sixteen young represented the best total natural production of young since the inception of the program. All of these young fledged successfully.

JOB IV-C

OBJECTIVE: To monitor likely potential nest sites on cliffs through the various mountain ranges in the state to locate active breeding pairs.

A volunteer effort was organized to monitor cliff sites in Shenandoah National Park, the George Washington National Forest, and the Jefferson National Forest. All work was coordinated with the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service. A list of approximately 50 potential cliff nest sites was developed. Volunteers were recruited to monitor as many sites as possible. This effort resulted in the location of a pair of subadult peregrines in the mountains of Shenandoah County and several records of single birds in other locations. This search was continued in the summer at several locations, resulting in the location again of the previously mentioned pair as well as several additional single birds.

JOB IV-D

OBJECTIVE: To evaluate additional mountain release sites for future releases of peregrine falcons.

Two sites, Short Mountain in the Massanutten Range and Elliots Knob in the George Washington National Forest were visited and assessed for suitability for hacking. Both sites were considered acceptable and will be considered as alternate sites in 1991.

Three sites, Big Devil Stairs, Old Rag Mountain, and Crescent Rock were visited and evaluated for peregrine releases in Shenandoah National Park. Old Rag Mountain is an excellent site and will be used in 1991.

TARGET DATE FOR COMPLETION: Continuing

STATUS OF PROGRESS: On schedule

SIGNIFICANT DEVIATIONS: None

RECOMMENDATIONS: Continue study

COST THIS SEGMENT: \$24,400 total
\$18,300 federal
\$ 6,100 state

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