

1981

Peregrine Falcon Investigations

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STATE: Virginia PROJECT NO.: EW-1-5

PROJECT TYPE: Research and/or Inventory STUDY NO.: III

PROJECT TITLE: Virginia Endangered Species Investigations JOB NO.: III-A-1, III-A-2, III-A-3

STUDY TITLE: Peregrine Falcon Investigations

PERIOD COVERED: July 1, 1980 - June 30, 1981

JOB III-A-1 OBJECTIVE: To obtain Sightings of Peregrine Falcons in Virginia and determine where migrants are located.

JOB III-A-2 OBJECTIVE: To introduce Peregrine Falcons at back sites on the barrier islands of the Eastern Shore of Virginia. There are histroical records of tree nesting peregrines in Eastern Virginia. This program will be an attempt to restore peregrines to this portion of the former range.

JOB III-A-3 OBJECTIVE: To operate a peregrine falcon banding station at Fishermans Island N.W.R. during the fall migration period.

SUMMARY:

Counts were made of raptors passing Fishermans Island for a 32-day period in September and October. A total of 9,300 raptors were seen, of which 91 were peregrines, including 12 adults. Hacking stations were operated at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Great Fox Island, Cobb Island, and downtown Norfolk. Twenty-two birds were released and nineteen successfully dispersed from the release sites. A raptor trapping and banding station was operated for 32 days at Fishermans Island with 4 peregrines captured.

Fall Migration

A station to monitor raptor movements during the fall migration was established on Fishermans Island at the south end of the Eastern Shore of Virginia. The station was manned a total of 32 days during September and October. A total of 9,300 raptors were seen, of which 91 were peregrine falcons. Of these falcons, 12 were positively identified as adult birds. In general, the peregrine migration in the fall of 1980 did not appear to be as spectacular as in the previous year.

Winter Records

Sixteen one-day trips were made during the winter and early spring to the Virginia barrier islands and other coastal areas to locate wintering falcons. Wintering birds were found, relatively more common than in previous years. Wintering birds were located at Assateague Island, Wallops Island, Parramore Island, Hog Island, Smith Island, Cobb Island, and Fishermans Island. In addition,

a single wintering adult again occupied the Virginia National Bank Building in Norfolk and the City Hall Building in Newport News. Unfortunately, the latter bird was found dead at the base of the building in the late fall.

A necropsy of this bird was conducted at National Wildlife Diseases Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin. The necropsy showed massive, general trauma injury probably due to a fall. Chemical analysis showed the bird probably died of strychnine poisoning with subsequent trauma due to a fall from the building.

One pair of birds wintered at Fishermans Island and remained there at least into mid-June. These birds apparently had formed a pair bond and consisted of an adult female and a subadult male. Early in the fall, an adult male was present at Fishermans Island and stayed there until at least March. This male clearly was not a member of the pair later observed and his fate is unknown.

A pair of peregrines was observed on the hack tower at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on March 20. These birds apparently moved to a new hack tower on Wallops Island shortly after its completion in early April. Close examination revealed that this pair consisted of an adult male and a subadult female. Both birds were banded although no other markers appeared to be present. These birds apparently have now returned to the hack tower on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

A single adult female spent the summer on Metomkin Island.

Hacking Stations

Three new peregrine hacking towers were constructed during the fiscal year, one at Wallops Island, one at Great Fox Island, and one at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Existing sites at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Cobb Island, Fishermans Island, and Norfolk, Virginia brought the total sites available for peregrine releases to seven.

Because of the pairs of birds in residence at both Wallops and Fishermans Island, peregrines were not hacked at either of these sites. Back Bay was not utilized because of a potential conflict with a gravel hauling operation.

A total of 22 young peregrines were placed at the four remaining sites. Six birds each were placed at Chincoteague, Great Fox Island, and Cobb Island. Four birds were released at the urban site in Norfolk.

All birds fledged and dispersed successfully from all of the sites except Chincoteague. Approximately one week following the release at that site, the adult male peregrine from Wallops Island appeared and dispersed all of the young birds. Harassment of the young continued for a week at which time three of the young peregrines failed to return to the tower. The remaining three managed to feed frequently enough to disperse successfully from the

site. Immediately following dispersal of these three young from the site, the adult male reappeared and established residency on the hack tower.

A most encouraging sign for the release program has been the appearance of both adult and subadult birds in the area of a number of the release sites. In addition to the two pairs mentioned above, a single subadult tiercel was at both the Great Fox Island and Cobb Island sites during the entire hacking period. Neither subadult showed any aggressive tendencies toward the young peregrines. A subadult female appeared at the Norfolk release site and also showed no aggressive tendencies toward the young. The presence of those subadult and adult birds suggests the strong possibility that there may be breeding pairs in the nesting season of 1982.

Trapping Program

A peregrine falcon trapping station was operated on Fishermans Island for 32 trapping days during September and October.

Three hundred ninety raptors were captured, banded, measured, and weighed. Only 4 peregrines were captured, all immatures. One of these birds had been banded at Assateague Island the previous day.

The low capture rate for peregrines was due in part to the presence of a highly territorial adult male peregrine at the trapping site. This male was aggressive toward all peregrines which approached Fishermans Island and diverted most individuals away from the trapping site.

TARGET DATE FOR COMPLETION: June 30, 1982

STATUS OF PROGRESS: On Schedule

SIGNIFICANT DEVIATIONS IN PROGRESS: None

RECOMMENDATIONS: Continue with Remaining Project Plans

COST THIS SEGMENT: Federal \$ 8585 : State \$ 4292 Total \$12,877 :

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Chief, Division of Game

DATE: August 1, 1981

R. H. Cross, Jr.
Acting Executive Director