



Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

In 1962, Rachel L. Carson sounded an alarm about the irresponsible use of pesticides with her landmark book, *Silent Spring*.

Among the dangers she described were the adverse effects of chemicals—particularly DDT—on the reproductive capacity of some birds, especially predatory species such as the bald eagle and peregrine falcon. Her book raised public awareness of this issue, and was one of the catalysts leading to the United States banning the most damaging pesticides.

The peregrine falcon was among the birds most affected by the toxins. It was listed on the endangered species list. Yellowstone National Park was a site for peregrine reintroductions in the 1980s, which were discontinued when the peregrine population began increasing on its own. The falcon made a comeback in much of its former range, and was delisted in 1999. For 15 years after the delisting, the peregrine will be monitored closely, and scientists will watch for threats to their population.

Yellowstone National Park's relatively pristine conditions and long-term monitoring of peregrines provides baseline information to compare against other U.S. populations. Continued monitoring is essential, not only for comparisons with other populations, but also because peregrine falcons and other raptors are reliable indicators of contaminants (such as PBDE—polybrominated diphenyl ether) and climate change. For example, to assess the levels of PBDE, scientists collect eggshell remains after peregrines have left their nests for the season.

Identification

- Slightly smaller than a crow.
- Black “helmet” and a black wedge below the eye.
- Uniformly gray under its wings. (The prairie falcon, which also summers in Yellowstone, has black “armpits.”)
- Long tail, pointed wings.

Habitat

- Near water, meadows, cliffs.
- Nests on large cliffs overlooking rivers or valleys where prey is abundant.

Behavior

- Resident in the park March through October, when its prey—songbirds and waterfowl—are abundant.
- Lays 3–4 eggs in late April to mid-May.
- Young fledge in July or early August.
- Migrates to South America.
- Dives at high speeds (can exceed 200 mph) and strikes prey in mid-air.

2010 Status

- From April to July, biologists monitored 26 eyries in Yellowstone.
- 20 were occupied by at least one adult.
- Nesting occurred in 16 eyries; 12 pairs raised 27 young.