

PEREGRINE FALCONS

Peregrine falcons disappeared from Iowa's skies in the mid-1960's as a result of DDT weakening the shells of the peregrine eggs. As the population declined, the peregrine falcon was put on the federal and state endangered species list, where it remained until 1999.

An effort was undertaken to reintroduce the peregrine falcon into the wild in Iowa, starting in 1989. At first, the peregrines were put in hack boxes on smoke stacks and tall buildings in urban areas. Later the birds were introduced to cliffs. Biologists stopped re-introducing young peregrines in hack boxes in 2001. In 2015, Iowa had 23 nesting pairs of peregrine falcons. They are found in Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Mason City, and along the Mississippi River.

Peregrines live to age 12 to 15, however the mortality rate is high in the first year of the peregrine's life, with over half dying within the first year of life. The older peregrines tend to stay in one area, while the peregrines recently fledged will migrate.

Federal regulations allow a few peregrine falcons to be captured each year to use in falconry in the states where the falcon resides or passes through. The following rules apply:

- Falconers will be selected each year via a lottery system.
- Only falconers who are master falconers or who have five consecutive years of field experience as a falconer are allowed to participate in the lottery.
- A falconer can only have one wild peregrine in his possession.
- Falcons, under one year of age, can be captured between September 20 and October 20. Banded birds cannot be kept.
- A falconer cannot sell or give the peregrine to another falconer, but instead must return the falcon to the wild if the falconer no longer wants the peregrine.
- The peregrine can be used for breeding purposes; there is no limit to the number of captive peregrines that a falconer can possess.



Peregrine falcon. Photo by Lowell Washburn, Iowa Department of Natural Resources

In order to capture a peregrine, the falconer will lure a peregrine to a net in the fall during the migration. Generally the falconer catches a passage peregrine falcon (a bird born in Minnesota or Canada) rather than a bird born in Iowa. Generally the adults will reside year-round in one area while the young will move around and will migrate to the southern states.

The captured peregrine falcon will be used for hunting small animals, such as rabbits, squirrels, geese, ducks, and pheasants. Current state law allows other raptors to be used by falconers.¹

Chapter Recommendations

- The Iowa Chapter prefers that the falconer select a peregrine that was injured and was taken to an animal rehabilitator. However that may not be feasible since the falconers prefer a falcon that is a few months old - one that was recently fledged - since they are easier to train the falconry skills.
- The Chapter encourages the Department of Natural Resources to monitor the population of peregrines in the state and those migrating through the state. Should the populations start to decrease, the DNR needs to be prepared to terminate the program that allows the capture of wild peregrines.
- The Chapter does not support expanding the number of peregrine falcons that can be captured. Nor does the chapter support allowing the birds to be traded, sold, or given to another person.

Reference Material

www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Iowas-Wildlife/Peregrine-Falcons

www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Wildlife-Stewardship/Non-Game-Wildlife/Diversity-Projects/Peregrine-Restoration

“Peregrine Falcon”, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, 2006, found at www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/Peregrinefactsheet.pdf

For Iowa’s regulations for hunting with falcons, see www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Hunting-Licenses-Laws

“Peregrine Falcons in the Mississippi River Valley”, Living In Iowa, December 5, 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=USQs4Bwxa18

“Peregrine Falcons”, www.khoifm.org/node/1242 , broadcast September 23, 2015

“Peregrine Falcons in Iowa”, Wildlife Diversity News, September to December, 2016, page 5

¹ Wild raptors that can be used for falconry include the American kestrel, Cooper’s hawk, Ferruginous hawk, Goshawk, Great horned owl, Gyrfalcon, Harris’ hawk, Merlin, Prairie falcon, Red-tailed hawk, Rough-legged hawk, Sharp-shinned hawk. Additionally captive-bred species can be used for falconry.