



The Peregrine Falcon: Time to Delist?

By Mary Hennen

The Chicago Peregrine Release & Restoration (CPRR) program celebrated its 10th anniversary in 1995. With a proposal before the federal legislature to remove the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) from the Endangered Species list, it is an appropriate time to update Illinois birders on this species' status.

Historically, 400-500 breeding pairs of peregrines nested east of the Rocky Mountains. By the 1960s, largely due to the effects of DDT, there were none. When CPRR began, only 4 territorial pairs of peregrines were known for the entire Midwest. Last year the Raptor Center in Minnesota reported 62 Midwest territorial pairs, 41 of which were successful in fledging young. Illinois had its first successful breeding since 1951 when two chicks fledged from a downtown Chicago nest in 1988.

Young tagged Peregrine Falcon photographed at Fermilab, Batavia, DuPage County. April 1988. Photo by Rudy Dorner courtesy of Fermilab Visual Media Services.

Chicago has been showing an increase not only in the number of territories but also the number of young fledged per year (Table 1).

Begun in 1985, CPRR

joined efforts already underway to reestablish the peregrine falcon in the Midwest. Over a five year period, 1986-1990, CPRR released 46 immature falcons. This was just a small portion of approximately 660 peregrines reintroduced throughout the Midwest from 1982 to 1993. As this number grew and more peregrines returned to breed on their own, the annual number of released peregrines gradually decreased. By 1995, only one release program in the Midwest is active; Kentucky is currently in its third year of a five year program.

Most states, including Illinois, have shifted into the second phase of restoration which involves the monitoring and managing of those peregrines holding territories. Project personnel ensure the safety of the falcons, assess their health, track resident and migrant birds, and serve to educate the public about the species.

With population numbers on the rise, many are claiming a victory for the peregrine's recovery. Last fall, the Arctic Peregrine Falcon was removed from the Endangered and Threatened Species list. Currently,

the peregrine population for the continental US and lower Canada is under consideration for delisting. Even if the delisting occurs, peregrines will remain protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

As encouraging as this sounds, many feel that it is too early to claim such a victory. Once removed from the Endangered Species list, the peregrine loses many of the advantages it had as a protected species. Concerns have been expressed about maintaining our current stewardship activities if money or other resources are focused away from peregrines to other species.

With the loss of the endangered status, it is possible that managers and owners of buildings that have nesting peregrines will be less cooperative. Also, with less funding for personnel, the manpower to ensure breeding success may be forfeited. Either circumstance can have a negative impact on the peregrine population. Some of the successful breeding statistics reported depend on numerous individuals who look after the peregrines and work to ensure the success of each nest under their care. For instance, a high proportion of the nesting peregrines are residing in cities away from the historic eyries. In 1995, three of the eight immature peregrines that fledged from Chicago nests were retrieved off the city streets after landing from their initial flight. Without personnel to look after the peregrines, over 37% of