



© istockphoto.com/T.K. James

FAST FACTS

NAME: Peregrine falcon

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Falco peregrinus*

AVERAGE WEIGHT: 570 g (males), 910 g (females)

AVERAGE WINGSPAN: 1 m

AVERAGE LIFESPAN: 4 to 5 years

DID YOU KNOW? Peregrine falcons return to their favourite nesting areas every year. Pairs of peregrines have nested on Lundy Island, England since 1243.

PHYSIOLOGY

Imagine being able to chase someone at 320 km/h. That's how fast the peregrine falcon can dive and sneak up on its prey. Peregrine falcons use their long, pointed wings and long narrow tails to make quick, powerful wing beats that allow them to travel at high speeds.

The peregrine is perhaps best identified by the black mask of feathers that covers its face. They have dark bluish-grey heads and backs. Their throats and under parts are white, dispersed with black and brown feathers. Peregrines also have hooked bills, large feet and sharp talons to help them attack and eat their prey.

The female peregrine is traditionally known as the "falcon" and like most birds is larger than the male or "tiercel." Adult females are 46 to 54 cm long and weigh about 910 g, while males are 38 to 46 cm long and weigh about 570 g. The two sexes also have different voices. The male peregrine's voice is wheezy and high-pitched and the female's voice is coarse and raspy.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

The peregrine falcon prefers nesting in open areas that are best-suited for the falcon's direct pursuit style of hunting. As a result, the peregrine favours habitats that are in open non-forested areas, including marshes, sea coasts, river valleys and tundra. Peregrines traditionally nest on cliffs but on occasion they've been found nesting in trees and on flat ground. More recently, peregrines have started nesting on the tops of buildings.

The peregrine sits at the top of the food chain. Its diet consists primarily of other birds. The peregrine hunts larger and medium-sized prey by using its large feet to deliver fierce blows, killing its prey in mid-flight. The peregrine hunts smaller birds by snatching them up with their talons.

Peregrines are at risk of being exposed to high levels of pesticide residues because they eat birds that may have consumed grain or insects sprayed with pesticides. These pesticides are a problem for peregrines because the chemicals can weaken egg shells and effect hatching success.

RANGE

The peregrine falcon can be found in every part of the world except New Zealand, Antarctica and Iceland. There are 22 different races of the peregrine. Three of these subspecies are found in North America – the Peale's (*falco peregrinus pealei*), anatum (*falco peregrinus anatum*) and tundra (*falco peregrinus tundrius*). The Peale's peregrine nests year-round on the coast of Alaska and British Columbia. The anatum peregrine lives in the boreal forest south of the tree line. And, the tundra peregrine makes its summer home in the Northwest Territories. In the winter, anatum and tundra peregrines migrate south in search of warmer climates.