



# Peregrine Falcon Fact Sheet: Downtown Pittsburgh

Scientific name: *Falco peregrinus*

	Male	Female
Length	14" – 16"	16" – 18"
Wingspread	37" – 39"	40" – 46"
Weight	1 – 1.2 lbs.	1.6 – 2.1 lbs.

## DECLINE AND RECOVERY OF THE PEREGRINE FALCON

- Peregrine falcons were formerly one of the most widespread birds in the world. Prior to the 1960s, they nested at more than 350 sites east of the Mississippi, including 44 cliff sites in Pennsylvania.
- Long-lived pesticides such as DDT accumulated in falcon food chains causing "pesticide raptor syndrome." Females laid eggs with thin shells; the eggs broke during incubation.
- Peregrine populations crashed in much of the world by the 1960s, with no successful nest east of the Mississippi River by 1965.
- A recovery program was developed by Dr. Thomas Cade at Cornell University in 1970. Young birds were hatched from eggs in captivity and released into the wild.
- Today wild-born peregrines are given coded leg bands as part of this recovery effort.
- Peregrine falcons were one of the first species listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1974. They were federally de-listed in 1999 because they recovered in the western U.S.
- Peregrines are still a Pennsylvania Endangered Species because they have not fully recovered here. The Pennsylvania Game Commission is the official regulatory and management agency for this species
- In 2003, two peregrine falcon nests were found on cliffs in Pennsylvania, the first time since 1957 that Pennsylvania peregrines nested outside of cities.

## NEST SITE AT THE GULF TOWER

- Peregrines were first seen in Pittsburgh in 1990. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy partnered with the Gulf Tower and the PA Game Commission to provide a protected nesting site in Spring 1991, making the Gulf Tower the first building nest site in Pennsylvania.
- The original Pittsburgh pair had coded leg bands identifying them as part of the peregrine recovery program. The original female was released in the Shenandoah Mountains near the Virginia-West Virginia border in June 1989. The male was released in northeastern Tennessee in June 1989.
- The current Downtown pair is also banded. The female hatched at the Landmark Building in Akron, Ohio in 2007 and was named "Mary Cleo" at banding, renamed "Dori" when she nested at Gulf. The male hatched at the University of Pittsburgh in 2002 and was named "Louie" when he nested Downtown.
- The Gulf Tower nest site was used every year except for 2012 and 2013 when the peregrines moved to a building at Fourth Avenue Downtown. They probably left because

of workmen on the Gulf Tower roof installing a complicated light array in the winter of 2011-2012. Two years after construction was completed, the peregrines returned to the Gulf Tower in Spring 2014.

- Peregrines nest on cliffs and very tall man-made structures. The Gulf Tower is a good nesting site because of the positive attitude of building management, and because it offers:
  - one of the tallest locations in the area (best sites are 20+ stories);
  - a high, secluded ledge with no expansive areas of reflective glass;
  - locked, controlled access to the ledge and adjoining areas;
  - a relatively safe first-flight environment for young birds;
- Peregrines do not build nests. Instead they dig a depression in gravel to prevent their eggs from rolling off the ledge.
- The nest box is typically about 37" long by 30" wide by 5 3/4" deep with a roofed shelter (16" deep by 16" high) at the back of the box. The bottom of the box is filled with approximately 300 lbs. of "pea" size round gravel upon which the eggs are laid. Peregrines instinctively look for this or similar substrate on which to lay their eggs.

#### PEREGRINE NESTING AND FAMILY LIFE

- Peregrines nest only once a year, averaging four eggs (range is 3 to 6).
- Eggs are laid in March or early April. Incubation lasts 30 to 32 days, accomplished largely by the female. The male provides her with food during this period.
- The young are fed pieces of birds by their parents. In 35 to 40 days they are ready for first flight.
- Peregrine falcons feed almost exclusively on small-to-medium size birds caught in the air or occasionally on the ground. They eat hundreds of species of birds, including pigeons.
- Few birds are as swift. Peregrines dive after prey at approximately 200 mph.
- Pigeon control programs that use poison are dangerous to peregrine falcons. Two peregrines died in Baltimore after eating poisoned pigeons.
- Young peregrines are on their own a few weeks after fledging (leaving the nest) and normally disperse to areas outside of Pittsburgh by summer's end.
- Peregrine territories are very large. Only one pair resides in the Downtown area.
- In spring 2012 there were seven peregrine nests in the Pittsburgh area including Downtown, the Cathedral of Learning, and five local bridges.
- Pittsburgh's peregrines do not migrate because there is enough food for them here in winter. Arctic peregrines are migratory, breeding in Canada and wintering in Chile.
- For the latest peregrine news see Outside My Window ([www.wqed.org/birdblog/](http://www.wqed.org/birdblog/)), a blog by Kate St. John who monitors Pittsburgh's falcons.
- During the nesting season, watch this and the Cathedral of Learning nest via live webcams at the National Aviary's website ([www.aviary.org](http://www.aviary.org)).

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This project is a cooperative effort between the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the Gulf Tower, Make-A-Wish and the National Aviary. Special thanks to Robert Peirce & Associates for the network connection.

#### Questions can be directed to:

The Pennsylvania Game Commission (724) 238-9523

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