



## Peregrine Falcon Fact Sheet: Cathedral of Learning

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 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 banded with 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 under the state wildlife code because they have not fully recovered here. The Pennsylvania Game Commission is the official regulatory and management agency for this species.

### NEST SITE AT THE CATHEDRAL OF LEARNING

- Peregrines first arrived at the Cathedral of Learning in the mid-1990's but did not nest here successfully until 2002.
- Both peregrines at the Cathedral of Learning have coded leg bands which identify their birthplace. Neither bird was named when banded but earned a name when he/she nested. The female hatched at the Benjamin Harrison Bridge in Hopewell, Virginia in 2008 and was nicknamed "Hope" for her birthplace when she first nested at the Tarentum Bridge in Tarentum, PA. The male hatched at the Gulf Tower in downtown Pittsburgh in 2005 and was nicknamed "E2" after he nested here. Both birds flew here on their own.
- Peregrines nest on cliffs and very tall man-made structures. A pair of peregrines chose to nest on the Cathedral of Learning even before a nest box was installed.
- This building is a good nesting site because of the positive attitude of the building management, and because it offers:
  - the tallest location in the area (best sites are 20+ stories);
  - a high, secluded ledge with no expansive areas of reflective glass;

- locked, controlled access to the roof and adjoining areas; (continued)
- a relatively safe first-flight environment for young birds;
- lack of indoor disturbance (the adjacent area not constantly occupied).
- Peregrines must be protected from human intrusion during nesting. Protection is provided by the University by controlling access, and by endangered species laws.
- Peregrines do not build nests. Instead they dig a depression in gravel to prevent their eggs from rolling off the ledge.
- After the peregrines chose this building, the PA Game Commission provided a nest box to hold the gravel these birds prefer. The nest is not visible from inside the building.
- 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 Oakland area.
- In spring 2014 there were eight peregrine nest sites in the Pittsburgh area including this one and the Gulf Tower.
- 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 ([birdsOutsideMyWindow.org](http://birdsOutsideMyWindow.org)), a blog by Kate St. John who monitors Pittsburgh's falcons.
- During the nesting season, watch this and the Downtown 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 University of Pittsburgh and the National Aviary.

#### Questions can be directed to:

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