



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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ARCTIC PEREGRINE FALCON MAKES A COMEBACK;
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES REMOVING FROM
ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST

Only 20 years ago, one of the world's fastest birds, the peregrine falcon, was thought to be destined for extinction. Today, prompted by the bird's steady progress toward recovery, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to remove the arctic peregrine falcon, a northern subspecies, from the list of endangered and threatened species.

"Here is real evidence that the Endangered Species Act does what it was intended to do -- bring species back from the brink of extinction," said Service Director Mollie Beattie. "Success doesn't happen overnight, but this proposal to delist the arctic peregrine reflects the fact that recovery of endangered species is a very real, attainable goal of the Act."

The proposal applies to peregrine falcons nesting in arctic areas of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. These birds, currently classified as threatened, represent about 75 percent of all peregrines in North America. Service biologists note that endangered peregrines in other regions are also improving and may soon be proposed for reclassification.

(more)

Peregrine falcons have been protected under the Endangered Species Act since 1973. Long admired for their hunting ability and spectacular aerial dives of up to 200 miles per hour, the species began to decline in the late 1940s due to reproductive failure caused by pesticides containing DDT. Peregrines in eastern North America had disappeared by the early 1970s, while numbers in the west and north had declined to about one-fifth of their historical levels. Populations began to rebound in the late 1970s, largely due to restricted use of DDT in the United States and Canada.

According to Beattie, the peregrine situation demonstrates that efforts to clean up pollutants in one region can result in dramatic improvements in the health of ecosystems far away. Peregrines that nest in northern areas spend winter months as far south as Argentina. These peregrines were affected by DDT by preying upon contaminated birds in southern latitudes.

"The recovery of peregrine falcons in arctic areas resulted largely from restrictions on DDT far beyond the breeding range," Beattie said. "While we can breed and release peregrines and many other endangered species to the wild, few will survive without a clean environment."

The Service's proposal to remove the arctic peregrine falcon from the endangered species list was published in the September 30, 1993, Federal Register. For the next 90 days, the Service will gather public comments on its proposal, and within 12 months, make a final decision on delisting the subspecies. If a decision is made to remove the arctic peregrine falcon from the list, an intensive 5-year monitoring program to ensure populations continue to improve or remain stable will be implemented. If necessary, the Service can take emergency action to add the species to the list.

For more information on the proposal or to submit comments, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Endangered Species Branch, 1412 Airport Way, Fairbanks, AK 99701.