



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SAVED FROM NEAR EXTINCTION, ARCTIC PEREGRINE FALCONS ARE REMOVED FROM ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST

The Arctic peregrine falcon, one of nature's swiftest and most beautiful birds of prey, has recovered from near-extinction and no longer needs protection under the Endangered Species Act, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

"Banning DDT was the first step in the peregrine's recovery, but the Endangered Species Act was the rest of the story," said Fish and Wildlife Service Director Mollie Beattie. "The peregrine's return is proof that industrial development can occur while protecting endangered species."

Beattie said the Service is removing the falcon from its status as a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act. The falcon was listed as endangered in 1970 because of population declines caused by the pesticide DDT, which caused female falcons to lay thin-shelled eggs that cracked before hatching. In 1984 the Arctic peregrine had recovered sufficiently to be reclassified to "threatened," a less dire category under the Endangered Species Act.

The Fish and Wildlife Service attributes the falcon's recovery primarily to restrictions on the use of organochlorine pesticides such as DDT, but said protection, research, and recovery actions funded and carried out under the Endangered Species Act had been essential to protecting breeding and migrating falcons so that the diminished populations could recover and rebuild. The act protected falcon nest sites from disturbance and destruction and prohibited the taking of peregrines from the wild for the sport of falconry; it also required review of Federal projects for possible impacts on falcons.

Under provisions of the Endangered Species Act, the Federal Government and industry in Alaska have worked together to help the falcon recover without halting development on Alaska's north slope. Oil and gas geologists have worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service to schedule their work to avoid sensitive nesting areas during critical times of year to minimize any impact on peregrines. Additionally, employees from ARCO Alaska, Inc. (an oil company) have notified the Fish and Wildlife Service when they discover new nests in the course of their work.

Although organochlorine pesticides were not used in the Arctic where peregrines breed, Arctic peregrine falcons were exposed to the pesticides because they and some of their prey species migrated through or wintered in areas where such pesticides were used. The use of organochlorine pesticides continues in Latin America, where some Arctic peregrines winter; however, it is not currently having a negative effect on reproduction. Total population figures for Arctic peregrines are not known because many of the species' remote range areas are not thoroughly studied. However, studies of known breeding sites and migration counts suggest there may be more than three times as many peregrines now as in the late 1970s. For example, the average number of Arctic peregrines seen migrating at Cape May, New Jersey, increased from 136 in 1976-79 to 588 from 1990-93.

The peregrine falcon is a medium-size brown or blue-gray raptor (bird-of-prey) that preys mostly upon birds. Arctic peregrines nest in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland and most winter in Latin America. Migrating Arctic peregrines travel throughout many parts of the lower 48 states and often concentrate in some coastal and estuarine areas along the Atlantic coast and Gulf of Mexico. Migrants also pass through inland areas including the Great Lakes, Great Plains, and Rocky Mountains.

The Arctic peregrine is one of three subspecies that occur in North America. The American peregrine falcon continues to be listed as an endangered species; Peale's peregrine is not listed. Because the subspecies look so much alike, all three are protected under the "similarity of appearance" clause of the Endangered Species Act in the coterminous states in order to protect the endangered American peregrine falcons. All falcons also are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

"The Arctic peregrine falcon has recovered because the American people were willing to clean up our environment and to take extraordinary care to protect endangered wildlife," Beattie said. "I think all Americans can be proud that we live in a country that works so hard to preserve our irreplaceable wildlife heritage, and that our children and grandchildren now will have the chance to know the awesome speed and fierce beauty of the peregrine."

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Editors Note: A limited number of still photos and video footage of Arctic peregrines are available by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service audiovisual office at 202-208-5611.