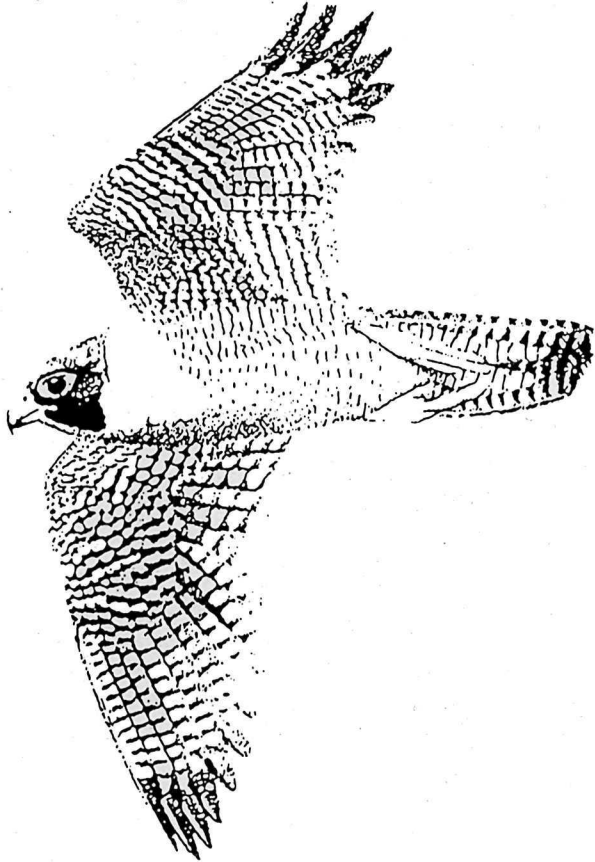


Peregrine Falcons Soar Crater Lake Cliffs

by Scott Stonum, Biological Technician

Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) are crow-sized predatory birds that are distributed throughout the world. Their diet consists chiefly of other birds. Because the peregrine is at the top of the food chain, toxic chemicals tend to accumulate in their system. The pesticide DDT, which was



banned in the United States in 1972, causes thinning of egg shells and dehydration. DDT continues to be a problem because many peregrines migrate to, and eat birds that migrate to, Mexico and South America where this pesticide is still being used.

The eyrie, or nest, here at Crater Lake was one of just two in Oregon that were successful in producing young in 1991. It was occupied in 1979, and remained in use until 1983. These birds successfully fledged young in 1979, but were unsuccessful in 1980. Each of the three eggs laid in that year showed high levels of DDE, a harmful derivative of DDT. Young were successfully fostered into the nest and fledged in 1981 and 1982.

When both adults disappeared in 1983 and were replaced by immature birds, a practice known as "hacking" was initiated. This practice involves placing captive raised young into nest sites. Twelve young were "hacked" (or released) in the succeeding four years. An adult pair was present at the historic eyrie in 1986, but did not successfully breed.

Peregrines nested again at Crater Lake in 1987. The nest was manipulated by park personnel to ensure that the pair would successfully fledge young. Four eggs were removed from the nest, of which three hatched and were fledged in California. Two other captive bred young were then fostered into the Crater lake eyrie. Unfortunately, one of the young was killed, possibly by a great horned owl. The other bird successfully fledged.

In 1988 the peregrines again used the historic eyrie and laid four eggs, of which three hatched. Approximately twelve days later all of the young and the adult female were killed, again, possibly by great horned owls. In order to ensure the successful fledging of peregrines in the Crater Lake area it was decided to cross-foster young peregrines into a nearby prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) nest. The prairie falcons successfully fledged two peregrines in this effort.

In 1989 and 1990 it is believed that the male returned with an immature female. However, inclement weather, lack of funds and logistical problems limited monitoring efforts in 1990. In 1991 the historic eyrie again became active. The male was identified as a previously captured wild bird. This pair was successful in fledging three young without any human manipulation.

Although the hatching success in recent years has been good, analysis of the eggs shows significant thinning and that the female has been subjected to pesticide contamination.

The successful fledging of three young in 1991 is very promising and is the result of many years of effort and patience. The site will again be monitored during 1992. Should the falcons continue to nest at the same eyrie, steps may need to be taken to monitor and evaluate the effects of predation on the peregrines.

The peregrine falcons at Crater Lake illustrate how National Parks have become islands in our modern world. The success of preserving wildlife and ecosystems depends not only on what we do within the boundaries of this park, but how humankind conducts itself on this planet.