

The return of the peregrine falcon in Maine

A recent report indicated that a new peregrine falcon nest has been spotted in a part of Maine's Acadia National Park. Park officials say the peregrine nest was sighted in and around Beech Cliff on the southwest side of Echo Lake.

Peregrine falcons, *falco peregrinus*, have been nesting on the Precipice for some years, but Beech Cliff is the second area where a nest has been seen.

There is little information on past populations of the eastern peregrine in Maine. Only 16 eyries (nests) are referenced in the historic literature, but this is likely an underestimate.

Maine joined other states in a large-scale reintroduction program. Young, captive-reared peregrines were slowly released



peregrine falcon

at former nest sites in a process called "hacking." A total of 144 birds were successfully released at eight different locations in Maine from 1984-1997. Peregrines began to nest in Maine in 1987. The first successful nesting of re-established peregrines in Maine occurred in Oxford County. In 1988, the last site occupied by eastern peregrines in Acadia National Park was reoccupied. From 1988-2001, five to eight pairs nested in the state at 13 different sites. Young have been produced at normal rates. The population dramatically increased to 15 pairs in 2002. Reintroduced peregrines have been successful in New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York, and undoubtedly young produced there have established eyries in Maine. With recovery of the species nationwide, the peregrine falcon was taken off the federal endangered species list in 1999, but its breeding population remains listed as endangered on the Maine list, as its numbers here are still low.

Peregrines are found worldwide and breed on all continents except Antarctica. Although once broadly distributed in North America, they disappeared throughout much of their historic range.

Shooting and collection of peregrines or their eggs were infrequently documented in Maine during the early 1900s. Increased use of pesticides after World War II, especially DDT, caused drastic declines in peregrine populations worldwide. Organochlorine compounds like DDE, a by-product of DDT, resulted in shell thinning, egg breakage and reproductive failure. The same fate experienced by the bald eagle population.

After peregrines were completely extirpated (eliminated) from the eastern United States by the early 1960s, DDT was banned in the U.S. in 1972. Although no longer used here, this chemical persists in our envi-

ronment and is still used in South America where peregrines winter. Habitat is not limiting in Maine, where cliffs adjacent to large open areas are in good supply. Eyries are built high on mountain sides.

The peregrine falcon is a sleek, rapid-flying bird of prey. Its wingspan measure 35-46 inches, body length ranges from 13-19 inches and they weigh about 20-35 ounces. Females are about 30 percent larger than males. Otherwise, the sexes are similar in appearance.

Peregrines generally reach sexual maturity at two years of age. They form permanent bonds and remain mated for life. Peregrines breeding in Maine return from wintering areas and establish territories in March or April. Courtship displays include high circling, undulating flights, and figure-eight flights.

Peregrines migrate in the fall, primarily to coastal areas in the southeast or Central and South America. However, some adults breeding in the Northeast may remain year-round.

Fledglings remain at the nest through August.

Peregrines attack and kill their prey in flight by a sharp blow from a vertical dive. Diving speeds have been estimated at 200 miles per hour. Primary prey include shorebirds, seabirds, rock doves (pigeons), and a variety of other small birds.

Human disturbance, such as hiking or rock climbing, during the nesting season, can cause nest failure.

Acadia Park officials say if the peregrines successfully nest, the area will remain closed until approximately five weeks after the last chick leaves the nest (possibly into September). Otherwise, if the nesting fails, the area will be reopened sooner.

Roland's trivia question of the week:

Name the two current members of the Boston Red Sox to have won a World Series with two different teams.

Answer on page 15.



by Roland D. Hallee

SCORES & OUTDOORS

Little League action in full swing



Left, Kim's Garage catcher Patrick Hopkins attempts to apply a tag on J&S Oil's Noah Dugal as he slides safely at home during a recent Winslow Little League game held at the Boston Avenue Field in Winslow. Center, Keanu Earle, of J&S Oil in the classic catcher's position awaiting a pitch, and right, Garrett Lunt of Gagnon Chiropractic delivers a pitch.

Photos by Mark Huard/Central Maine Photography

First place winners in New Hampshire classic



Central Maine United U-12 girls soccer team took first place in the 18th annual Memorial Day Classic soccer tournament in Amherst, New Hampshire. They faced teams from New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont and Rhode Island. Team members, front, left to right, Sammy Grandahl, Eryn Doiron, McKenna Brodeur, Sabrina Carey, Paige Smith, Fern Calkins and Gabby Martin. Back, Coach Chuck Calkins, Madison Morneau, Cassidy Charette, Lilly McLaughlin, head coach Molly Wilkie, Fotini Shanos, Meg Nadeau, Jordan Jarbar, Devin Fitzgibbons, coach Andrew Morneau.

Photo by Joe Jabar



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