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Peregrine Falcon Investigations

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PERFORMANCE REPORT

STATE: VIRGINIA PROJECT NO.: W-77-R-4
PROJECT TYPE: RESEARCH AND/OR INVENTORY STUDY NO.: IV
PROJECT TITLE: NONGAME AND ENDANGERED SPECIES INVESTIGATIONS JOB NO.: A-D

STUDY TITLE: PEREGRINE FALCON INVESTIGATIONS
PERIOD COVERED: July 1, 1986 - June 1987

JOB IV-A OBJECTIVE: To census migrant peregrines in the fall and to locate wintering birds.

JOB IV-B OBJECTIVE: To introduce captive-reared peregrine falcons at mountain hack sites as recommended by the Eastern Peregrine Falcon Recovery Team.

JOB IV-C OBJECTIVE: To operate a peregrine falcon trapping and banding station during fall migration at Fisherman Island and at Wise Point on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

JOB IV-D OBJECTIVE: To make detailed studies of non-breeding peregrine falcons at nest sites to determine possible causes of non-breeding status of the birds at these sites.

SUMMARY:

Five pairs of peregrines produced eggs at nest sites in Virginia. Four pairs were successful with a total of 14 young produced. Four young were subsequently lost to vandalism.

Four of five young hacked at Mount Rogers fledged successfully.

Fall trapping sites were operated at Wise Point, Fisherman Island, and Kiptopeke Beach.

The peregrine tower at Parramore Island was reconstructed for the second consecutive year following hurricane damage.

JOB IV-A - To census migrant peregrines in the fall and to locate wintering birds.

FALL MIGRATION

Three stations to monitor peregrine falcon and other raptor movements during the fall migration were operated at Fisherman's Island, at Wise Point on the tip of the Eastern Shore Peninsula, and at Kiptopeke Beach. The stations were operated a total of 154 man -

days during September, October, and November. A total of 365 peregrines was seen at these stations during migration. A peak number of 89 peregrines was observed at the Kiptopeke station on October 3, a time coinciding with a peak movement of falcons at the Cape May, New Jersey observation station. This represents the highest number of peregrines sighted on a single day in recent years. A total of 22,000 raptors was seen at the three stations during migration.

WINTERING POPULATIONS

Surveys were conducted to locate any wintering birds at breeding towers or elsewhere in the state. Pairs of adult birds were observed at Great Fox, Assateague, Metomkin, Hog, Cobb and Fisherman Islands. A subadult male was observed at Parramore Island. A pair of adult birds was reported on the Rappahannock River Bridge although project personnel did not see the birds. A single adult was observed on both the York and James River Bridges. Adult birds were observed with regularity in Norfolk, at Craney Island, and at Grandview Beach in Hampton. Numerous observations of immature peregrines were made on the Eastern Shore and in lower Tidewater during the winter.

BREEDING EFFORTS

The peregrine hack tower at Parramore Island was blown down for the second year in a row by hurricane winds. It was rebuilt with a different bracing arrangement which should resolve the problem of wind damage.

Considerable time was spent monitoring breeding towers for peregrines to detect both occupancy and the first evidence of breeding activity.

Pairs appeared at the towers at Fisherman, Cobb, Parramore, Metomkin, Assateague, Wallops, and Great Fox Islands. In addition, there still was a pair on the old Coast Guard Tower at Hog Island. The pairs at Wallops and Parramore were rather sporadic and eventually disappeared from the towers in late spring.

Of the above pairs, four attempted nesting. The pair at Great Fox Island laid three eggs and hatched three young. The pair at Assateague laid four eggs and hatched four young. The pair at Metomkin laid four young and hatched three young. The pair at Cobb Island laid three eggs which were found on the ground, apparently preyed upon by fish crows. In both 1986 and 1987, this pair has exhibited weak territoriality.

All 10 young produced in these four nests apparently fledged successfully.

The pair at Fisherman Island went through courtship activities but failed to lay eggs.

A fifth breeding pair was discovered by accident as a result of a law violation. A pair of peregrines nested successfully on an old ship in the reserve fleet anchored in the lower end of the James River. This pair produced four young which were taken from the nest at about 2 weeks of age. Reports were received of these four young and all subsequently were recovered at about 28-30 days of age by project personnel and Federal agents. Two young were returned to the nest site but were rejected by the parents. One of these young was placed on a hack site in Tennessee where it fledged successfully. The second of these two young was euthanized because of physical problems associated with improper diet. The remaining two young were sent to the breeding facility at Cornell University because of physical or behavioral problems related to captivity.

The reserve fleet is an excellent nesting site with a large prey base of pigeons. It will be monitored closely in the spring for peregrine activity.

JOB IV-B - To introduce captive-reared peregrine falcons at mountain hack sites as recommended by the Eastern Peregrine Falcon Recovery Team.

Five peregrines were made available in late August for hacking at Mount Rogers. These birds were hatched from eggs collected on the Ungava Peninsula in Canada and subsequently made available to the Peregrine Fund for use in this project.

Release was made in mid-August at a time when some of the first normal movement of migrant raptors was taking place in the mountains. One young peregrine apparently was killed by a red-tailed hawk. The remaining four birds apparently dispersed normally, although one somewhat prematurely.

Five peregrines were released at the Mt. Rogers site in June, 1987. These birds are still in the area and their success cannot be evaluated at this time.

JOB IV-C - To operate a peregrine falcon trapping and banding station at Fisherman Island and at Wise Point on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

TRAPPING STATIONS

Peregrine trapping was conducted at Wise Point, Fisherman Island, and Kiptopeke Beach during September and October. A total of 28 peregrines was captured at these sites, 4 of which had previously been banded. Three of these banded birds had been banded at Assateague Island the previous day. A report has not been received on the fourth bird.

FINDINGS:
JOB IV-D - To make detailed studies of non-breeding peregrine falcons at nest sites to determine possible causes of non-breeding status of birds at these sites.

Several days of observations were made of a non-breeding pair of adults at Fisherman Island. Food delivery rates by the resident male at Fisherman Island did not appear to be significantly less than that of males of pairs which exhibited breeding success. Food delivery by males of all pairs in Virginia appears to be much lower than in other areas on the East Coast as related by the Peregrine Fund. The reasons for two or three pairs of non-breeding adults in the state remains unclear.

TARGET DATE FOR COMPLETION: Continuing

STATUS OF PROGRESS: On Schedule

SIGNIFICANT DEVIATIONS IN PROGRESS: None

RECOMMENDATIONS: Continue Study

COST THIS SEGMENT: Federal 24,238 : State 8,079 : Total 32,317 :

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DATE: August 1, 1987