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Peregrine Falcon Investigations

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PERFORMANCE REPORT

STATE: Virginia PROJECT NO.: EW-1-6

PROJECT TYPE: Research and/or Inventory STUDY NO.: III

PROJECT TITLE: Virginia Endangered Species Investigation JOB NO.: III-A-1
III-A-2
III-A-3

STUDY TITLE: Peregrine Falcon Investigations

PERIOD COVERED: July 1, 1981 - June 30, 1982

JOB III-A-1 OBJECTIVE: To obtain sightings of Peregrine Falcons in Virginia and determine where migrants are located.

JOB III-A-2 OBJECTIVE: To introduce Peregrine Falcons at hack sites on the barrier islands of the Eastern Shore of Virginia. There are historical records of tree nesting peregrines in Eastern Virginia. This program will be an attempt to restore peregrines to this portion of the former range.

JOB III-A-3 OBJECTIVE: To operate a peregrine falcon banding station at Fishermans Island N.W.R. during the fall migration period.

SUMMARY:

Counts were made of migrating raptors at Fishermans Island for a 25 day period in September and October. A total of 7,380 raptors was seen, of which 42 were peregrines. Hacking stations were operated at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Russell Island, and Great Fox Island. Nineteen birds were released and 19 successfully fledged and dispersed. Three adult pairs returned to former release sites. One pair bred successfully and produced three young. Three raptor banding sites were operated for an aggregate of 69 days with 19 peregrines captured.

Fall Migration

A station to monitor raptor movements during the fall migration was established on Fishermans Island at the south end of the eastern shore of Virginia. The station was manned a total of 25 days during September and October. A total of 7,380 raptors was seen, of which 42 were peregrine falcons. Of these falcons, only eight were positively identified as adults. The fall migration period was characterized by numerous days of strong northwesterly winds, conditions which are not conducive to a good raptor movement over water to Fishermans Island.

Winter Records

Several one day trips were made during the winter and early spring to the Virginia barrier islands and other coastal areas to locate wintering falcons.

Wintering birds were located in three downtown Norfolk locations, one downtown Newport News location, Fisherman Island (2), Cobb Island (2), Wallops Island (2), Craney Island, and Assateague Island (1). Several unconfirmed reports also were received of sightings at Parramore, Cedar, and Hog Islands. In addition, two apparently reliable sightings were made near Williamsburg, Virginia.

With the exception of one adult female which has wintered in downtown Norfolk for a number of years, most of these birds are thought to have been birds from previous hackings. Several were positively identified as such on the basis of bands which were observed.

Hacking Stations

One new hacking tower was constructed at Russell Island in Chesapeake Bay. Existing sites at Wallops Island, Great Fox Island, Cobb Island, Fishermans Island, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and downtown Norfolk brought the total sites potentially available for peregrine releases to eight.

Several sites could not be used in 1982 for peregrine releases because of the presence of individuals or pairs of either subadult or adult birds. An adult tiercel was in residence at the Norfolk site and pairs at Cobb Island, Chincoteague, and Fishermans Island. Wallops Island was not used because of the proximity of the pair at Chincoteague.

The pairs at all three sites went through courtship rituals and were observed copulating on several occasions. The females at Fishermans Island and Cobb Island apparently did not lay eggs. The female at Chincoteague laid eggs and was first observed incubating on May 25. Eggs were thought to have hatched on or about June 25. Three chicks were produced on the tower and at this time are within a week of fledging.

In addition to these birds, single individuals of unknown age appeared at both the Russell Island and Great Fox Island sites.

In 1982, the sites at Russell Island, Great Fox Island, and Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge were used for releases. Six birds each were released at Russell and Great Fox Islands, and seven birds at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. All 19 birds fledged successfully.

Trapping Program

Three trapping stations located at Fishermans Island, Cobb Island and Back Bay were operated during September and October. Trapping stations were operated for 9 days at Cobb Island, 25 days at Fishermans Island, and 35 days at Back Bay.

A total of 416 raptors was caught at Fishermans Island of which four were peregrines. Two of these peregrines had been previously banded. One was an adult bird previously hacked at Cobb Island in 1980. The other was a bird banded as a nestling in Greenland in the summer of 1981 by the Danish Museum of Zoology. Five peregrines were captured and banded at Cobb Island, and ten at Back Bay. Of the 19 peregrines captured, one was an adult and the remaining 18 were all immatures.

The relatively low capture rate of peregrines at the three sites probably was influenced by many days of high northwesterly winds, conditions not conducive to inshore movement of falcons. In addition, at Fishermans Island, a territorial male pursued every migrant peregrine which he encountered.

TARGET DATE FOR COMPLETION: June 30, 1983

STATUS OF PROGRESS: On Schedule

SIGNIFICANT DEVIATIONS IN PROGRESS: None

RECOMMENDATIONS: Continue with remaining Project Plans

COST THIS SEGMENT: Federal \$18,000.00:State \$6,000.00: Total \$24,000.00:

PREPARED BY: Mitchell A. Byrd

APPROVED BY: Jack W. Raybourne
Chief, Division of Game

DATE: August 1, 1982

R. H. Cross, Jr.
Executive Director