

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

DESCRIPTION

Both the male and female peregrine have slate blue upperparts although the female is often a more slightly brown colour. The male or 'tiercel' is approximately a third smaller than the female. Juvenile birds can be identified by their brown coloured plumage with vertical streaks on the chest.

Favoured nest sites are on cliffs or rocky outcrops, increasingly in man-made environments such as quarries although some birds will nest on the ground. The clutch size is usually between 3-4 with a mean number 2+ fledged young per pair. Diet consists of mainly small to medium sized bird species with pigeons being the favoured prey item.

LOCAL BIODIVERSITY IMPORTANCE

Peregrine numbers have increased since the disastrous national decline in the 1950s caused by the impact of pesticides on breeding success. At its lowest point the national peregrine population was estimated to be at 360 pairs in 1963 (Report of the Raptor Working Group), which has increased to approximately 1300 pairs, with 260 or so of these breeding in England. The population in the National Park was believed to have declined to only one or two pairs at this time but has since increased, partly due to the dispersal of juveniles from the Cumbrian population. There are now approximately 15 sites in the National Park where peregrines have regularly attempted to breed in recent years. It is likely that the breeding populations of peregrines in the Yorkshire Dales National Park would eventually be limited by the availability of suitable cliff/crag nesting ledges.

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL BIODIVERSITY IMPORTANCE

The peregrine falcon is afforded special protection under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and is on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern.

The North Pennine Moors Special Protection Area was designated to "promote the conservation of the site and take steps to avoid deterioration of the habitats as well as disturbance of the species for which the area has been designated" with one of the species for which these areas were designated being peregrine.

CURRENT ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS

The national population of peregrines suffered in the 1960s due to the use of DDT and other organo-chloride pesticides. These accumulated through the food chain and caused the thinning of eggshells resulting in a significant reduction in breeding success of many species of birds of prey. The chemicals were banned in the mid-1960s leading to a slow and gradual increase in the population although nationally this has been significantly slowed due to human interference and persecution.

The perceived threat to grouse stocks and racing pigeons from peregrines has led to the historical persecution of peregrines by grouse moor managers and pigeon fanciers. Peregrines are also particularly at risk from egg collectors and from falconers who will take both the eggs and young birds. The UK Raptor Working Group Report concludes that in

the UK 7.5% of racing pigeons are lost to raptors including peregrines compared to an overall loss of 52% for other causes. The main losses appear to be from a failure to home or from straying.

There is also the risk of disturbance to breeding birds by recreational activities especially climbing. To try and prevent any potential disturbance to breeding birds there are annual meetings involving representatives from the British Mountaineering Council, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, English Nature and the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union. These meetings have led to mutually agreed climbing restrictions during the breeding season at several sites that has resulted in a number of successful peregrine breeding attempts.

One of the main issues concerning peregrine populations in the Yorkshire Dales National Park is the apparent poor breeding success at some nesting sites. Analysis of all the available breeding data for sites within the National Park should determine whether or not this is the case.

AIMS OF THE SPECIES ACTION PLAN

- To maintain the current breeding population of peregrine falcons in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.
- In the long term (10+ years) to achieve a natural breeding density of peregrines in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

OBJECTIVES

To achieve these aims we need to:

- Analyse the existing data to determine peregrine breeding success at all sites in the National Park.
- Depending on the outcome of the above, devise and implement conservation actions to increase the breeding success if required.
- Increase the number of peregrine nesting sites monitored on an annual basis.

ACTIONS & TARGETS

To achieve these objectives the following actions should be carried out and the targets achieved within the time-scale given:

Actions	Target date	3 year cost £
Devise and implement a program to monitor peregrine falcon nest sites.	2003	Officer and Volunteer Time.
Analyse breeding data and determine if there are any sites where there is consistently poor breeding success.	2002	Officer and Volunteer Time.
If applicable, devise and implement conservation actions to increase the breeding success of peregrines these sites.	2003	Officer and Volunteer Time.

WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACTION PLAN?

Lead Agency	Key Partners
Yorkshire Dales Upland Bird Study Group	Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Landowners and managers Moorland Association Moorland Keepers Association Volunteers Police Wildlife Liaison Officers