

Welcome Back

hook, just
attention-grabbing

1 Full speed ahead! The peregrine falcon perched high on a cliff ledge spots a starling below. His keen vision allows him to focus on the target. Head pointed down, wings and feet tucked in, he begins his dive.

2 A peregrine's dive or "stoop" can reach speeds of up to 200 miles an hour. No speeding ticket for this guy, though. Instead, success! He strikes the starling, circles back and grabs it with his sharp talons. Mission accomplished.

3 Just as he's catching his next meal, a fellow falcon streaks by at a level cruising speed of 55 miles per hour. Sunlight reflects off of his blue-gray back, a black moustache lines the sides of his face beneath a black head and white cheeks. Long pointed wings permit him to easily shift positions while in flight.

4 The peregrine falcon is a magnificent bird and we are fortunate to be able to enjoy these agile flyers today. Once one of the most widespread birds of prey, the peregrine almost completely disappeared from our skies.

5 In the 1950s and 1960s, farmers used DDT, dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, to kill insects that damaged their crops. Birds that the peregrine falcon fed on were eating the insects with DDT in them, which built up in the falcon's body, causing the female falcons to lay thin-shelled eggs. When they sat on their eggs to keep them warm, the eggs broke before the chicks could hatch.

6 Hoping to help the falcons, scientists began raising chicks in captivity. Eggs were hatched in laboratories under the scientists' watchful eyes. Hand puppets that looked like the mother falcons were used to feed the babies. That way, they remained wild because they thought "mom" was feeding them. In 1974, the first peregrine falcons raised in captivity were released into the wild.

7 Raising falcons in captivity, as well as other actions taken during the 1970s, helped to increase their numbers. The use of DDT was banned in 1972, and the following year the peregrine falcon became protected under the Endangered Species Act. Due to all of these

efforts, these remarkable birds have made a comeback from 235 known nesting pairs in 1975, to an estimated 2,000 pairs in the United States and Canada today.

Thanks to the actions of scientists and others who cared enough to save the peregrine falcon, we are able to, once again, enjoy these aerial acrobats.

—Susan Nagle-Schwartz is a freelance writer interested in wildlife conservation, Pennsylvania.

Track The Falcon

The Falcon Research Group is an organization committed to saving birds of prey. One of their projects involved placing GPS transmitters on several tundra peregrine falcons to track their migration.

Traveling between Chile and the Arctic, they cover between 6,000 and 8,000 miles on their journey. You can follow the travels of Sparrow King, La Serena, and all of their friends by visiting the web site: www.frg.org. Click on the "Field Research" tab, and then, "Southern Cross Peregrine Project" to find out where they are in the world.

Cherry Blossom Spirit

Pink buds rain upon
People waking underneath
A petal shower

Air smelling sweet
Light and graceful on you're feet
Dance, Sakura-Chan

Soft and round
Swirling, twirling to the ground
Looks, feels, smells like love

With the sunrise, she
Is blown away by the wind
In it's smooth branches

Her blossoms still live.

—Cassie Lowell, 14, Maryland.

A2 → Peregrine falcons use extreme speed to hunt their prey: other birds.

A4 → We are lucky that the Peregrine is around because they almost died out.

A5 → Because their prey ate the DDT-poisoned insect, the falcons began to lay eggs that had thin shells.

A6 → Scientists raised falcon chicks in labs so that they could eventually be released into the wild.