

Peregrine

The emblem of the Hawk and Owl Trust, the Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) is the largest falcon breeding in Britain



The Peregrine's powerful body, short tail and pointed wings give it a distinctive chunky appearance. This is the fastest falcon, reaching more than 200 miles an hour when stooping on its prey

The females are significantly larger than the males. Both sexes are slate-grey above, white with grey barring beneath, they have a pure white upper chest and cheeks and a prominent moustachial stripe.

Length: 36-48cm; wingspan: 95-110cm

Status in UK

1,400 pairs, increasing; AMBER listed; resident and passage/winter migrants from Scandinavia

Population trends

Before the Second World War the population was stable at c.700 pairs, suppressed by persecution and restricted to the north and west. During the War half the population was killed to protect homing pigeons carrying military messages.

The population recovered to pre-war levels by the 1950s, only to be reduced to some 400 pairs due to the effects of persistent pesticides. These also caused less than a fifth of those remaining to breed successfully. Since the restrictions in the use of these chemicals, the population has steadily increased. The birds have re-colonised old sites and moved south. They have also begun to breed on buildings in urban areas, where natural sites are not available.

Some persecution still occurs with eggs and young taken and adults killed. Hawk and Owl Trust local groups and others organise wardening of nest sites and set up observation points for the public.

Habitat and distribution

Peregrines are found in open country, including moorland, farmland, wetlands and the coast.

They breed throughout Scotland, Wales, the north and south-west of England and coastal areas of Northern Ireland. They now also breed in several major cities. In winter they can also be seen along the south and eastern coastal areas of England.

Breeding

Pairs return to traditional sites on cliffs and inland quarries. The species also uses ledges on high buildings in many of our cities.

Feeding

Peregrines mostly take birds in flight, from goldcrests to grey herons and even geese. Prey reflects those available, but feral pigeons are especially favoured, as well as starlings and thrushes; seabirds are important on the coast.

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