DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release May 4, 1975 Levitt 202/343-5634

AMERICAN PEREGRINE
FALCON RECOVERY TEAMS NAMED

The "Red Baron" of the avian world--the peregrine falcon, known for its speed, grace, beauty, and skill--is now the object of a new coordinated venture to save it from extinction in the United States.

Two recovery teams have been established to assist in the propagation and reintroduction of the endangered American peregrine falcon, according to Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The streamlined birds, which have been clocked in dives at 200 miles an hour, once nested throughout the lower 48 States. Today, the American peregrine population is wiped out east of the Rocky Mountains; no more than 50 active nests are known to exist in the United States. Pesticides, especially DDT, and industrial pollutants have been the major reasons for the decline and have caused thinning of falcon eggshells, making them too fragile to survive normal incubation. Habitat destruction, shooting, and other human disturbances also have been factors in the bird's decline.

The peregrine falcon is a medium-sized hawk-like bird with long, pointed wings and long tail. The adult is slate blue above and its wings, tail, and flanks are barred with black. The adult male has a white throat with black streaks on each side of its face. Its strong, hooked bill and powerful taloned feet make it a highly specialized and efficient hunter. It feeds almost entirely on birds, virtually always striking them in flight.

(more)

There are 18 subspecies of the peregrine throughout the world. Three subspecies, the Arctic, the Peale's, and the American are found in the United States.

The peregrine specializes in direct pursuit in the open and favors non-forested areas in which to hunt, particularly shores, marshes, river valleys, open moors, and tundra. Even though its level speed of flight exceeds that of most birds, the peregrine takes advantage of height from which to launch its attack.

A diving peregrine is a hurtling wedge of streamlined feathers, its feet lying back against the tail and wings half closed. At such speeds it delivers a fierce blow to the prey with a half-closed foot, the usual method of disabling or killing its prey. As is usual in predator-prey relationships, it tends to single out the unwary or the older and weaker individuals.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 directs the Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct a program of conservation and restoration of endangered animals. To help accomplish this goal, two recovery teams were named this week, one concerned with reestablishing the American peregrine in the Eastern United States, and one to help restore populations in the Rocky Mountain region. Ultimately teams will be named for the Pacific States and for the Arctic peregrine falcon in Alaska.

The teams have representation from a number of States, agencies, and other organizations and will be in continuous contact with other recognized experts on the peregrine falcon.

The eastern team must start from scratch since no peregrines are known to still nest in its area. An inventory of old nest sites (called eyries) is scheduled along with experimental release of peregrines raised

in captivity at Cornell University. The young peregrines will be artificially raised at actual nest sites in hopes they will return as breeding adults two or three years later. The inventory will provide data on which former nest sites will be more suitable for future release. Among the participants in the program are State wildlife agencies, the Army Materiel Command, Cornell University, U.S. Forest Service, the National Audubon Society, and numerous private ornithologists.

The Rocky Mountain team will be primarily involved with reversing the downward population trend in its area. Eggs from pairs with a history of unsuccessful nesting because of the DDT problem will be replaced with eggs produced by captive peregrines. Old, abandoned eyries will be inventoried and selections made among them for possible releases of captive-produced young.

Eastern Population Recovery Team

Rene Bollengier, Leader
Fish and Wildlife Service

Dr. Thomas Cade
Cornell University

Lawrence Brown
New York Department of Environmental Conservation

Bernard F. Halla
Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Malcomb Edwards
U.S. Department of Agriculture

James Baird
Massachusetts Audubon Society

Donald Hager
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Rocky Mountain Southwest Population Recovery Team

Gerald Craig, Leader
Colorado Division of Wildlife

Albert W. Heggen
Colorado Division of Wildlife

Morlan W. Nelson
Tundra Films

Dr. James H. Enderson
Colorado College

C. Eugene Knoder
National Audubon Society

Dr. Joel V. Kussman
National Park Service

Dale L. Wills
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Dr. Richard D. Porter
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Frank M. Bond
Santa Fe, New Mexico

x x x