

Return of the peregrine falcon

One of the swiftest birds in the world, the peregrine falcon, may survive extinction in North America if an imaginative experiment works, Acting Environment Minister Roméo LeBlanc announced recently.

The Canadian Wildlife Service has had success in breeding in captivity *pergrinus anatum*, the most endangered of the three subspecies found in North America. Most of the 41 young birds produced this year have been set free in various urban, rural, and remote places in Canada where the species formerly existed.

"These releases are primarily experimental, to develop techniques for re-introduction," said Richard Fyfe, the CWS biologist who has led this effort to save the peregrines in Canada. "The young birds will run heavy risks as they learn to fly and hunt on their own."

The Canadian Wildlife Service plans to continue releasing captive-raised young peregrines into the wild in the hope that some will survive and begin to breed.

Widespread declines in peregrine populations in North America and Europe began in 1945. Surveys of traditional North American nesting sites in 1970 and 1975 revealed that the bird had been eliminated in the east and was rapidly declining on most of the continent.

High residue levels of toxic chemicals were found in surviving falcons and their eggs, which caused thin eggshells, unsuccessful eggs, and abnormal behaviour in parent birds.

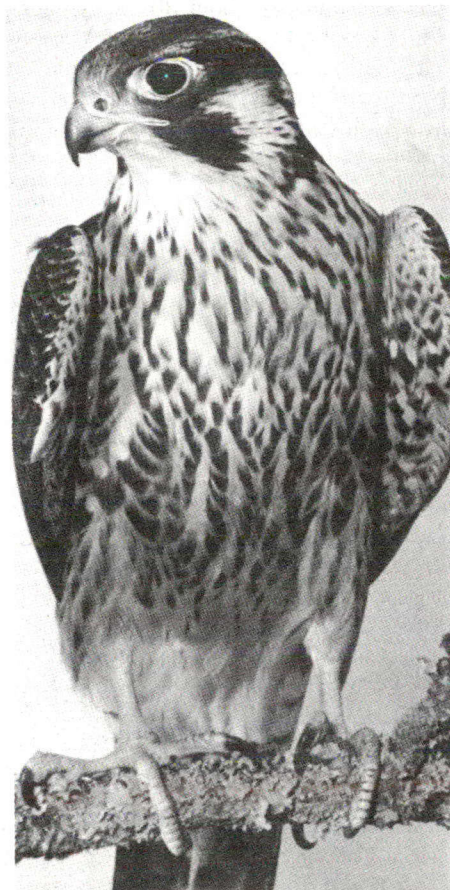
"Captive birds used to produce the newly released falcons have very low residues and are laying viable eggs with normal shell thickness," according to Richard Fyfe.

This work in Canada is closely linked to a similar program in the United States, run from Cornell University. The Cornell team is also releasing captive-raised peregrines. The CWS effort has been possible through the co-operation of the provinces and the territories, who have the responsibility for protecting peregrines. Alberta and the Northwest Territories have been especially active in support of the CWS project.



Newly-hatched peregrines are awkward bundles of creamy white down with

disproportionately large feet (and mouths, too, at feeding time).



Ever since the nomads of central Asia first pursued game with trained hawks and falcons, the peregrine falcon has been a favourite of falconers. Now an endangered species in North America, the peregrine may survive if an experiment conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service succeeds.

The peregrine falcon lives mainly on other birds, which it can overtake and kill in flight with ease. In a dive in pursuit of its prey, it has been timed at speeds of up to 200 miles an hour.

The "Sun Life falcon"

The most famous of such birds was the "Sun Life falcon", a female which appeared as a yearling in 1937 outside the twentieth floor of the Montreal headquarters of the Sun Life building. An aggressive bird who disliked any invasion of her family life, she remained for 16 breeding seasons, had three successive mates, and reared 21 young. Her readily-observable nest site resulted in a host of admirers, considerable newspaper coverage, and a breeding record which, for a single falcon, remains unmatched in the annals of bird study.

Small increase in population

Canada's population passed 23 million on April 1, according to estimates by Statistics Canada. The actual figure was 23,063,000 from 22,737,000 for the same date a year earlier. From April 1975 to April 1976, population increased by 326,000 or 1.43 per cent, a smaller increase than the 1.58 per cent recorded from April 1974 to April 1975. The lower rate of increase is partly attributable to lower levels of immigration.