



2023 Maine Peregrine Falcon Program Report



Photo by Deb Powers

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Photo by Michael Tessier

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Executive Summary

Peregrine falcons, the fastest and most widely distributed bird of prey, inspire awe in all who catch a glimpse of them. This raptor species is unique in Maine due to its small population, practical conservation measures, and management that fosters partnerships across urban and remote habitats. Even in the midst of increasing populations, peregrines remain vulnerable due to their modest numbers and sensitivity to nesting disturbance. Despite these challenges, partners in both urban and forested landscapes can work to ensure population stability.

Whether nesting on a bridge, building, or cliff, peregrines are susceptible to disturbance during their breeding season. Knowing the presence and location of the nest is invaluable for guiding the timing and nature of activities in the vicinity. Adult peregrines defend their nests aggressively, posing a safety hazard to unsuspecting individuals and leaving the eggs or chicks vulnerable to overheating or chilling. Furthermore, fledglings near the point of flight can be at risk of falling if startled. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's (MDIFW) Raptor Biologist collaborates with partners to develop creative conservation strategies.

Beyond efforts at nest sites, peregrine conservation initiatives continue to revolve around positively impacting the population throughout the state. This comprehensive approach includes the development of a state species conservation plan, broadening partnerships, tailoring messaging for various audiences, active participation in professional meetings, monitoring mortality and disease, contributing to regional banding efforts, integrating current and historic breeding season survey data into species databases, and conducting annual breeding surveys and reporting. The population's size and sensitivity emphasize the need for ongoing statewide monitoring and management.

To fully appreciate current conservation efforts, it's essential to consider the dramatic history of the peregrine falcon. In the 1960s peregrines nearly disappeared nationwide due to the pesticide DDT, but a subsequent ban on this contaminant, coupled with restoration initiatives, led to their resurgence. Peregrines were absent from Maine for over 30 years but successfully returned to nesting in 1988. As they expanded, monitoring all breeding sites became a logistical challenge. Between 2019 and 2021, an attempt was made to visit all known nest sites with recent peregrine activity (Call 2019b, 2020, 2021b). This created a thorough understanding of the status, accounted for variation that may occur between years, and contributed to the formation of valuable partnerships. Subsequently, visits have been limited to locations where knowledge of the breeding status informs on-site practices or as interest and available surveyors permit.

In 2023, at the 34 sites that were visited 30 pairs were observed. Of those 30 pairs, 18 pairs attempted to nest. Three nest failures were confirmed, and the 17 successful nesting pairs hatched 37 chicks. All young were documented at 28 days or older and 11 were observed in flight. Of the 17 nesting pairs that produced chicks, six were cliff nesters, and of the 11 urban nesters, three were in quarries, six were on buildings, and two were on an old osprey nest built on top of transmission/light towers. Overall productivity (# fledglings/total # pairs, 1.23) was lower than in 2022 (1.47) but similar to '21 – '19 (1.22, 1.32, 1.29 respectively).

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Photo by Erynn Call

Background

The peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*; hereafter peregrine) almost vanished from the continental United States because of the widespread use of the pesticide DDT. The population in the Eastern U.S. was historically rare and thought to be completely gone by 1964 (Enderson et al. 1995). In 1970, the peregrine was declared a Federally Endangered species, and efforts were taken to save it, such as banning DDT and other harmful chemicals and breeding the birds in captivity. These efforts were successful, and in 1999, the peregrine falcon was removed from the Federal list of Endangered species because it met certain criteria, including having a healthy population size, good reproductive performance, and not having environmental contaminants in its eggs or thin eggshells (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1999). Despite the Federal delisting of peregrines, they remain on the Maine state Endangered Species list. Peregrine recovery in Maine and throughout the Northeast has been a success; however, they continue to benefit from focused monitoring and management due to their small population size and the limited number of successful breeding pairs.

If you see a peregrine falcon in Maine, it is likely either a descendant of birds that were brought back as part of conservation efforts or a member of the Tundra subspecies. The American peregrine falcon subspecies used to be found in Maine but disappeared due to DDT. The reintroduced peregrines are a mix of birds from the captive breeding program and don't belong to specific subspecies or races. A total of 144 of these birds were released in Maine between 1984 and 1997 and they usually stayed in the state to breed and live. On the other hand, the Tundra subspecies don't breed in Maine but migrate through in the spring and fall. This subspecies was removed from the Federal list of endangered species and is not considered Endangered at the state level.

The Maine Peregrine Falcon Program in collaboration with a diverse array of partners is working to help protect and conserve this spectacular bird of prey. The program facilitates conservation actions intended to directly influence statewide peregrine population levels and habitats. These actions include monitoring breeding success, banding, understanding, and addressing potential threats to the population (e.g., causes of mortality, contaminants, disease), long-range species planning, assessing, and resolving issues at nest sites, data management, and extensive collaboration and outreach. The goal is to attain stable populations in Maine and contribute to metapopulation stability throughout the Northeast.



Photo by Erynn Call

Survey Methods

A standardized survey protocol and a list of breeding sites were created in 2019 (Call 2019a, updated version 2021a). Anyone interested in conducting standardized surveys can email erynn.call@maine.gov. Typically, the breeding season spans between March 15th and August 15th. However, young birds can be seen at their nest sites well into the fall, and like their parents, they tend to remain non-migratory. Visits should generally document the presence (or lack thereof) of a single adult or pair, nest/incubation, the number and age of chicks, the number of young that survive to ≥ 28 days, and any young observed at the flying stage. Incidental observations can be reported to [Maine eBird](#) any time of year.

Nesting Season Summary

Survey Results

An attempt was made to monitor all sites with a recent history of peregrine residency for three consecutive years beginning in 2019 (Call 2019b, 2020, 2021b). Since then, sites have been visited if there is a potential management benefit in documenting the breeding status or if there were surveyors available and interested. Thus, the tally is not indicative of a statewide total. More time and number of visits to a site create more certainty in the accuracy of the breeding status designation.

In 2023, at the 34 sites that were visited 30 pairs were observed. Of the 30 pairs observed, 18 pairs attempted to nest. Three nest failures were confirmed, and the 17 successful nesting pairs hatched 37 chicks. All young were documented at 28 days or older and 11 were observed in flight. Of the 17 nesting pairs that produced chicks, six were cliff nesters, and of the 11 urban nesters, three were in quarries, six were on buildings, and two were on an old osprey nest built on top of transmission/light towers. Overall productivity (# fledglings/total # pairs, 1.23) was lower than in 2022 (1.47) but similar to '21 – '19 (1.22, 1.32, 1.29 respectively).

Table 1. Site-specific results of peregrine falcon monitoring in Maine, 2023.

Site #	Site Name	Breeding Status	# Chicks	First Survey Date	Last Survey Date	Total Effort (min)	# Surveys
006	Mt Kineo	Pair - nest	1	3/28	7/11	235	2
012	Pine Mtn	Pair - nest	2	4/11	6/25	286	5
013	Buck's Ledge	Pair - nest	2	3/30	7/11	656	4
016	Bald Mtn	Pair - no nest		4/7	7/27	660	3
017	Mt Megunticook	Pair - no nest		4/19	7/12	209	2
020	Half Mile Pond	None		4/15	4/15	30	1
022	The Precipice	Pair - nest	3	3/17	7/14	428	6
024	Beech Cliff	None		4/27	4/27	90	1
025	Valley Cove	Pair - nest	2	3/22	7/7	283	4
030	Grafton Notch	Pair - no nest		4/13	6/7	60	3

Table 1 continued. Site-specific results of peregrine falcon monitoring in Maine, 2023.

Site #	Site Name	Breeding Status	# Chicks	First Survey Date	Last Survey Date	Total Effort (min)	# Surveys
035	East Royce Mtn: Evans Notch	Pair - nest	1	5/18	6/19	109	2
043	Barren Mtn	Pair - no nest		4/11	4/11	120	1
044	Jordan Pond	Pair - no nest		5/25	7/21	538	3
045	Squaredock Mtn	Pair - no nest		4/15	6/23	220	3
046	Brimstone Mtn ¹	Pair - no nest		4/29	4/29	10	1
049	Ironbound Island	None		6/30	7/12	146	2
051	Bath Iron Works	Pair - nest	3	5/10	6/18	31	2
052	Casco Bay Bridge	Pair - no nest		3/14	5/10	5	5
053	Piscataqua Riv Bridge I-95 ²	Pair - nest - NH	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
056	Pejepscot Quarry	Pair - nest failure		4/11	7/18	327	4
057A	Franco Center	Pair - nest failure		3/9	5/19	367	7
058B	Westbrook Quarry	Pair - nest	3	5/23	6/26	189	3
059A	Granite Hill Quarry	Pair - nest	1	4/28	6/8	85	4
060	395 Bridge ³	Pair - nest failure		3/17	7/12	15	5
061	Old Town Mill	Pair - nest	1	4/22	6/12	75	2
062	Winslow Mill	See 062B		4/13	6/2	70	3
062B	Hathaway ⁴	Pair - nest	1	6/8	7/9	120	2
063B	Belfast Quarry	Pair - nest	4	5/30	6/14	50	2
065	Ram Isl Ledge Lighthouse	Pair - no nest		6/10	6/14	315	2
066B	Saint Andres	Pair - nest	4	3/10	6/23	1527	16
067D	Trans Tower Bucksport ⁵	Pair - nest	1	5/30	6/28	191	4
069	Dragon Fields Quarry	None		4/21	4/21	65	1
082	Fourth Debsconeag Lake	Pair - no nest		5/7	8/1	160	4
086	Sappi Mill Skowhegan	Pair - nest	1	5/30	6/19	70	3
130	Dragon Cement Products	Pair - nest	4	5/30	5/30	15	1
136	Madison Mill	Pair - nest	3	4/11	7/18	250	5

¹On 8/5, 4.5 mi north of 046 Brimstone Mtn. over Mooselookmeguntic Lake, a suspected fledgling peregrine was observed flying with an unknown age peregrine. Note there are southeast-facing cliffs 1 mile to the south of the lake on Bemis Mountain that might be suitable nesting habitat, or these birds could have been from Brimstone.

²Counted as part of the NH state total as the pair was just over the state line, 3 young.

³Male band 64/BU, 3rd-yr return, subadult (with silver leg band), and adult female observed, 1 egg, did not hatch.

⁴New nest site, pair with nest failure at nearby 062 Winslow Mill in 2022.

⁵New nest site, pair with a nest at nearby 067C Trans Tower Prospect South in 2022.

Survey Effort

A total of 118 surveys were conducted, with 133 hours logged, and 34 sites visited between 3/9/23 and 8/1/23. Some sites were not visited in 2023 but peregrines were documented at these locations in recent years (Table 2). It will be important to document activity at these locations as opportunities arise to do so.

Table 2. Most recent monitoring results of sites that were not visited in 2023.

Site #	Site Name	Breeding Status	# Chicks	Year Last Monitored
001	Bigelow Mtn - Old Man's Head	Single		2021
002	C Bluff Mtn	Pair - nest	2	2019
007	Wassataquoik Mtn	Pair - no nest		2021
009	Horse Mtn	Pair - no nest		2021
018	Eagle Bluff Mountainy Pond	Pair - nest	4	2021
019	Fletcher Bluff	Pair - no nest		2022
027	Jordan's Delight	Pair - nest	2	2022
029	The Brothers*	None		2022
031	Tumbledown Mtn	Single		2022
038	Tumbledown Dick Mtn Peru	Single		2021
041	Rattlesnake Mtn	Single		2019
042	Ragged Jack Mtn	Pair - no nest		2019
055	Bear Mtn Waterford	Pair - nest	1	2022
064	Indian Stream Mtn	Pair - nest	3	2021
124	Slidedown Mtn: West Branch of Sandy Stream	Pair - nest	1	2021

*A single 15-minute survey was incidentally conducted.



Photo by Ed Rosenberg

Banding

When possible, adult or young peregrines are fitted with a United States Geological Survey (USGS) leg band etched with a unique nine-digit number and a bi-colored band with a unique series of colors, letters, and numbers. In the Northeast, peregrines are banded with the colors black over green (see photo on the right). Information from banded birds provides invaluable insights into survival, movements, and how long individuals may stay at a nest site as part of a breeding pair. Five hatch-year birds were banded in 2023 (Table 3).

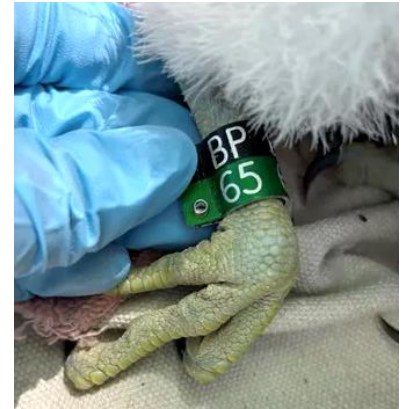


Photo by Acadia National Park

Table 3. Maine peregrine falcon banding summary, 2023.

Date Banded	Site/Town	Status	Age	Sex	Color Band	Contact/Partner
6/1	022 The Precipice	Banded at nest	HY	F	BP/65 ¹	Acadia National Park
6/1	022 The Precipice	Banded at nest	HY	F	BP/66	Acadia National Park
6/1	022 The Precipice	Banded at nest	HY	M	BP/12	Acadia National Park
6/2	059A Granite Hill Quarry/Hallowell	Banded at nest	HY	F	BP/77	MDIFW, Biodiversity Research Institute
8/9	066B St. Andres	Treated and released ²	HY	F	BP/78	MDIFW, Center for Wildlife

¹Fatally hit by a car in Pennsylvania on 7/31/23.

²One of the four chicks that hatched at 066B St. Andres in Biddeford was recovered on 6/20 a few streets over from the nest, treated by the Center for Wildlife, banded, and released on 8/9 at adjacent site 066 MERC.



Erynn Call (MDIFW). Photo by Center for Wildlife



From left to right Logan Route (Biodiversity Research Institute [BRI]), Chris DeSorbo (BRI), Kendall Marden (MDIFW), and Lauren diBiccari (BRI). Photo by Erynn Call

Maine hasn't annually banded a significant number of peregrines since the species' reintroduction. Recently, only a handful were banded (2019: 0, 2020: 2, 2021: 5, and 2022: 10). This is limited compared to neighboring states. Between 35 to 55 chicks are consistently banded annually in each of the following states: MA, NJ, NY, PA, and VA. Considering this, it's remarkable how many observations of banded peregrine we document. It may indicate either banded peregrines are conspicuous or that the overall population, like the breeding population, is relatively small.

Observations of banded peregrines in 2023 include:

- **49/U**: A returning female was observed at 057A Franco Center in Lewiston. She was originally banded at 025 Valley Cove in Acadia National Park in 2018.
- **C/N**: One of the four chicks that were banded at the 057B Continental Mill in Lewiston on 5/28/21 was fatally hit by a vehicle in Brattleboro, VT on 5/23/23. She was also observed in Brattleboro on 10/12/22.
- **64/BU**: For the second consecutive year (and likely third) this male was observed at 060 395 Bridge Brewer/Bangor. He was banded as a member of an unprecedentedly large brood at the Verizon Tower in Brockton, MA in 2019.



Photo by Justin Sweitzer, MDOT

- **BP/65**: One of the three chicks that were banded at 022 Precipice on 6/1/23 was fatally hit by a car in Pennsylvania on 7/31/23.
- **C/B**: For the first time in many years, male C/B, age 15 as of last year, did not return to 056 Pejepscot Quarry. He was originally banded at 052 Casco Bay Bridge.
- **Silver band only**: There were a couple of peregrines who were observed with metal leg bands only, making their identification impossible without having them in hand. This included a male at 136 Madison Mill and a subadult female at 060 395 Bridge in Bangor.

Mortality

Reports of peregrine mortalities were tracked in 2023 through collaboration with MDIFW staff and various partners.

- After an adult female was recovered on 7/24/22 in Bath, Avian Haven euthanized the individual on 2/21/23 as it was not able to recover sufficiently to be released.
- Avian Haven euthanized an adult peregrine that was found on 4/2 in a residential yard with a severe wing injury in Hope (5 miles to the NW of the nearest nest site 017 Mt. Megunticook).
- As noted above, one of the four chicks that were banded (C/N, female) at the 057B Continental Mill in Lewiston on 5/28/21 was fatally hit by a vehicle in Brattleboro, VT on 5/23/23.
- As noted above, one of the three chicks that were banded at 022 Precipice on 6/1/23 was fatally hit by a car in Pennsylvania on 7/31/23.

Additional Conservation Actions

The Maine Peregrine Falcon Program works toward promoting a self-sustaining population to restore the peregrine's ecological role and enable the public to enjoy this charismatic species within the state and beyond our borders. We have made great progress and continue to follow initiatives that are made possible through many successful collaborations and partnerships with dedicated federal, state, private, and individuals. In addition to conducting breeding season surveys, banding, and tracking mortality, conservation efforts also include the following:

Maine Peregrine Falcon Conservation Plan

After reaching out to various peregrine biologists across the Atlantic Flyway in 2020 and learning more about their approaches, it seemed as though a long-range strategic species conservation plan would be beneficial in Maine. This document could synthesize current knowledge and outline goals, objectives, and actions to guide future statewide conservation efforts. The idea was proposed in the fall of that year to upper-level managers and received support. A subsequent draft plan was submitted a year later in October 2021 for internal review. MDIFW has recently created a consistent format for this type of document, consequently, the revised peregrine conservation plan is set for completion by next year.



Photo by Michael Tessier



Photo by National Park Service, Michael Custodio

Nest Site Conservation

These include posting on-site or online signage, implementing trail closures, adjusting trail maintenance, forestry practices, or climbing activities at cliff sites. In urban locations, this may involve modifying the timing or locations of non-emergency repairs, maintenance, construction, inspections, or the strategic placement of nest structures in areas with recurring nest failures.

Cliff Sites

Achieving optimal breeding outcomes at cliff locations relies upon maintaining and building partnerships and collaborations with various state and federal agencies, nonprofits, landowners, private industry, and individuals. Work involves the coordination of monitoring, mitigating, and addressing disturbances via consideration of closing or rerouting trails. In addition, efforts also include participating in conservation planning, environmental review, development, and effective placement of trail signs and other outreach materials to connect with outdoor enthusiasts such as the hiking and climbing communities. Some accomplishments this year included:

- Worked with Buck's Ledge Community Forest in their planning process to incorporate consideration of peregrines at 013 Bucks Ledge.
- Provided guidance for trail work at Camden Hills State Park, 017 Mt. Megunticook.
- Coordinated monitoring and discussed climbing activity in the vicinity of 016 Bald Mountain.
- Discussed climbing and trail closures at 030 Grafton Notch with partners.
- Received reports from climbers regarding the presence of nesting peregrines at 035 Evans Notch.
- Partnered with Appalachian Trail volunteers to close spur trail near 043 Barren Mtn.
- Shared information with White Mountain National Forest regarding climbing activity close to traditional eyries at 045 Squaredock.
- Shared information about various breeding sites with the Mountain Project climbing website.
- Acadia National Park initiated trail closures at active peregrine nest sites.

Urban Sites

Like cliff sites, urban locations also require diverse partnerships to address management needs. This involves coordinating breeding monitoring and developing creative solutions to mitigate disturbances at a variety of urban nesting locations, such as adjusting the timing of maintenance and construction activities. Nest boxes are installed at sites where the existing local pair may benefit from safer and better nest conditions, such as better temperature and moisture control, improved shelter from extreme weather events (Sumasgutner et al., 2020), and reduced disturbance from people or mammals such as raccoons. Boxes also provide easy access to the young for banding, contaminant sampling, and outreach opportunities.

In 2023, urban sites were monitored to help inform any discussions surrounding established or emerging activities that might have the potential to disturb the pair or young. Sites with installed nest structures (e.g., trays or boxes filled with gravel) were monitored to varying degrees (Table 4). While several recently installed structures were not used, it's common for pairs to take several years to “discover” the locations.

Table 4. Artificial nest structure status during the 2023 breeding season in Maine.

Site	Site Name	Town	Structure	Installed	2023 Status
052	Casco Bay Bridge	Portland/S. Po.	tray	2021	Pair no egg
053	Piscat. Riv Bridge I-95	Kittery/Portsmouth	box	2019	Nest
053	Piscat. Riv Bridge I-95	Kittery/Portsmouth	tray	2021	Nest, adjacent box
060	395 Bridge	Bangor/Brewer	tray	2016	Nest failure, single egg
063B	Belfast Quarry	Belfast	box	2019	Nest, adjacent wall
63A	Passag. Bridge	Belfast	tray	2019	Nest at 063B
136	Madison Mill	Madison	box	2021	Nest, adjacent vent
086	Sappi Mill Skowhegan	Skowhegan	box	2021	Nest, adjacent ledge, but fledgling, adults perched at box
062	Winslow Mill	Winslow	box	2021	Nest at 062B
061	Old Town Mill	Old Town	box	2021	Box removed, nest on building
57D	Hill Mill	Lewiston	box	2021	Pair at 057A



Photos by Justin Sweitzer, MDOT

Outreach

Sharing the progress of peregrine falcon conservation efforts, participating in professional meetings, and connecting with various groups are important to achieving the goals of the Maine Peregrine Falcon Program. This year, some of the program's outreach activities and featured peregrine falcon stories included:

- Banding and release of a fledgling from nest site 066B St. Andres that had been cared for at the Center for Wildlife was shared on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).
- MDIFW I&E shared a video that was filmed by a surveyor via [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).
- MDIFW I&E shared information about the Maine Peregrine Program through an email bulletin with over 62K recipients.
- Information on numerous sites where peregrines may be present during the breeding season is posted on the [Mountain Project](#) website to create awareness for hikers and climbers.
- Participated in and presented at the [Atlantic Flyway Council](#) Raptor Committee meetings.
- Presented at the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust, Swan Lake Association, and Merry Spring Nature Center.
- An [article](#) shared news of the peregrine pair at 013 Buck's Ledge in Woodstock.
- The National Park Service posted a [piece](#) on peregrine falcons of Acadia National Park.
- A fledgling peregrine was released safely after ending up in an [Ellsworth toy store](#).

Data Management

We continue to make progress on data management to further strengthen our species conservation efforts.

- Over the past year Evan Jackson (2019 and 2021 full-time seasonal peregrine surveyor) in a part-time position has successfully entered historical breeding survey data dating back to the 1980s. These data will help determine how best to manage and implement conservation efforts for peregrines. This work is also supported by [The Little Egg Foundation](#) and [NestStory](#) software.
- MDIFW Data Analysis/Management Specialist Don Katnik has introduced a new data entry option for surveyors using [Survey123](#), aiming to enhance the efficiency of our peregrine program management.
- Don has also diligently updated the peregrine falcon breeding data within the MDIFW Environmental Review database, now accessible through the newly implemented [Environmental Review Tool](#).

How can you help Maine peregrines?

- If you have comments or want to join the Maine Peregrine Falcon Program (e.g., conduct standardized surveys, construction, or placement of nest structures, etc.) please email, erynn.call@maine.gov.
- Help monitor sites that were not visited often (Table 1, pages 5 & 6) or not at all (Table 2, page 7). Any incidental observations can be reported at [Maine eBird](#).
- Always feel free to contact MDIFW at (207) 287-8000 or at maine.gov/ifw.

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Photo by Deb Powers