



What do peregrines eat?

Peregrines mainly eat other birds, hunting by chasing or diving at great speeds, with their wings half folded. They can dive at speeds over 180 miles per hour, making them one of the fastest birds in the world!



Once they have caught their prey, they take it to a rocky ledge, or to the nest, where it is plucked and eaten. Peregrines also store food in favourite crevices in the rock – a natural fridge! Peregrines in the Avon Gorge feed on a variety of birds. Over 100

species of bird have been recorded in the diet of peregrines in Bristol including jackdaws, starlings, blackbirds, lapwings and woodpeckers. Sometimes peregrines hunt at night over the city, using the street lamps to help them see their prey. During the spring and autumn they take advantage of other birds such as woodcock and water rails migrating over Bristol at night.

Do peregrines stay in the Avon Gorge during the winter?

The peregrine's Latin name, *Falco peregrinus*, means wandering falcon. Around the world, many peregrines move over large distances between their nesting sites in the north (such as Lapland), and their wintering grounds in the south (such as Spain), in order to find food. However, in the UK they don't need to move very far, because they can still find food, even in very cold weather. During the winter, the Avon Gorge peregrines stay close by, often flying into the centre of Bristol, and

perching on churches and tall office buildings. Some of them have been colour-ringed to tell us more about where they travel. We know that many Bristol-hatched peregrines fly to the Midlands and the east of England. Others, especially the males, only move as far as the Chew Valley, south of the city. If you see a colour-ringed bird, please report the colour and letters to Euring, at www.ring.ac.

The organisations below have sponsored this leaflet. They help protect the peregrines in the Avon Gorge, and enable the public to see and learn more about them.



Bristol Ornithological Club

The Club has over 600 members and welcomes everyone from beginners to experienced birdwatchers. To find out more, or become a member visit bristolornithologicalclub.co.uk



Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project

The Project was set up to look after the wildlife of the Bristol side of the Avon Gorge and the Downs. It also aims to raise awareness about the importance of this unique place for people and wildlife. To find out more visit avongorge.org.uk

The Project is a partnership of:



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Peregrines in the Avon Gorge





Peregrines in the Avon Gorge

Less than two miles from the centre of Bristol, the Avon Gorge supports a huge variety of wildlife including one of the fastest birds in the world, the peregrine.

Peregrines have been nesting here since 1990. During the past 25 years they have raised over 70 chicks, including five young in 2008, 2010 and 2011. Until relatively recently, peregrines were rare in the UK. This was mainly due to dangerous pesticides, and illegal killing by people. Protection by law, and the removal of harmful chemicals from the environment, has helped their numbers increase in recent years. Over 1,400 pairs now nest in the UK, on cliffs, and also on buildings in cities such as Bath, Cardiff and Exeter. In 1990, two of the nestlings in the Gorge were illegally killed. As a result, the Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC) set up a Peregrine Watch to protect the nest, and show visitors the birds.



Male



Female

What does a peregrine look like?

Peregrines belong to the falcon family. They are the size of a crow with long, pointed wings, and a sharp, hooked beak. Despite their large size they can appear quite small against the tall cliffs. Their wings, back, tail, and the top of their head are mainly blue-grey in colour. They have white-cream underparts with spots and fine barring. Below each eye they have a thick, dark stripe. The legs and base of the beak (known as the cere) are bright yellow. The female (or falcon) is much bigger than the male (tiercel).

Young peregrines are browner on the back and head, with a streaked chest, pale yellow legs, and a blue-brown cere.

Where can you see them in the Gorge?

The peregrines are often found resting on trees or rock ledges in the Gorge. Look out for their white droppings splashed on the rocks. During February and March, the breeding pair is very visible and noisy. They can be seen circling overhead, and heard calling as part of their courtship display. Later in the year, when the young have left the nest, the whole family often circle in front of the Peregrine Watch point. In the vastness of the Gorge the peregrines can appear quite small.

Eggs

Peregrines lay between one and five eggs in late March, on a ledge or in a small cave on the cliffs. The eggs are incubated mainly by the female, and during this time the male does most of the hunting.



Young peregrine

Hatching

In late April, the eggs hatch. The chicks are fed by both parents, and they stay in the nest for six weeks. Whilst they are in the nest, they make a lot of noise, and frequently flap their wings. This helps them to strengthen their wing muscles as they get ready to fly.

Leaving the nest

The chicks leave the nest after six weeks, around mid-June. They stay in the Gorge throughout late summer and autumn, learning how to hunt and fend for themselves. After this, they leave the Gorge, and find their own nest site a year or two later. Occasionally a young bird may stay and help look after the following year's chicks with their parents.

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Family of five young chicks