



BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

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 of up to 200 miles per hour, making them one of the fastest birds in the world!

Once they've 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. Up to 30 species have been recorded in their diet, including jackdaws, starlings, blackbirds, lapwings and green woodpeckers, with pigeons being the most popular. Sometimes peregrines hunt at night over the city, using the street lamps to help them see their prey.



Peregrine feeding

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. *If you see a colour-ringed bird please report the colour and letters to the British Trust for Ornithology, www.bto.org or www.ring.ac*

Bristol Ornithological Club

Established in 1966, the Club has over 600 members and welcomes everyone from beginners to experienced birdwatchers. If you would like to know more about the Club and its varied activities, please ask a Watch member for an application form or visit our website: www.boc-bristol.org.uk

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project

The **Peregrine Watch** is supported by the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project. The Project is working to secure the outstanding wildlife interest of the Bristol side of the Avon Gorge, Clifton and Durdham Downs through a programme of wildlife surveying, monitoring and habitat management. It also raises awareness and understanding of this unique location and its importance for people and wildlife through an education programme. It is a partnership of Bristol City Council, Bristol Zoo Gardens, Natural England, University of Bristol, the Society of Merchant Venturers, and the Downs Committee. It also works with the National Trust who manage part of Leigh Woods, on the North Somerset side of the Gorge.

To find out more visit www.avongorge.org.uk

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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. Between 1990 and 2008 they have raised 49 young, including five chicks in 2008 – the largest recorded number raised in one year in the Gorge. Until relatively recently, peregrines were rare in the UK. This was mainly because of pesticides and illegal killing by people. Protection by law, and removal of harmful chemicals from the environment, has helped their numbers to increase in recent years. Over 2000 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. Since then, the **Bristol Ornithological Club** (BOC) has set up a **Peregrine Watch** to protect the nest and show visitors the birds.



Family of five young chicks



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.



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 then 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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