

7-Year Study of Falcons Provides Clues To Origins

Padre Island, Texas, is a major staging area for migrating peregrine falcons. During the 1986 Spring and Fall migrations on North and South Padre Island, 318 Arctic peregrine falcons were banded. An ongoing study (since 1979) by Dr. Don Morizot, University of Texas Science Park, monitors the status of this threatened species. His study compiles records of band returns and analyzes small amounts of blood withdrawn from each trapped falcon. By using electrophoretic analysis of blood enzymes, it has been possible in some cases to identity natural origin.

The falcons migrating along the Gulf coast, nest in Arctic Alaska, Canada and Greenland and spend the winter in South America. Thus, Padre Island provides critical habitat for large numbers of peregrines for as much as one-third of the year. Some interesting results so far indicate possible higher mortality of Alaskan birds during winter as opposed to the Greenland population. This suggests two different wintering locales, one being less favorable. Prospects for the peregrine falcon look good with higher numbers observed during each migration and from reports by biologists in the Arctic.

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