

The Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve

The Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve was established, in part, to ensure the protection of habitat for and populations of all fish and wildlife including the endangered American Peregrine Falcon.

This stretch of the Yukon River offers abundant cliffs and highly diverse lowland topography and vegetation within relatively short distances of nesting territories. The Yukon River valley is composed of low, rounded benches and ridges trending southwest to northeast and averages 2-3 miles in width.

The preserve lies within a climatic division of Alaska known as the interior basin. The mountains to the north and south tend to block the moderating influences of oceanic air masses, resulting in extremely low temperatures in the lengthy winter and high temperatures and low precipitation during the summers.

The complex geologic structure, severe semi-arid continental climate, frequent occurrence of wildfire, and discontinuous permafrost soils have interacted over time to create a complex mosaic of taiga and upland tundra biotic communities. The present diversity of subarctic flora and fauna reflect this interplay of physical processes and the near absence of late Pleistocene glaciation.

These vegetative communities experience annual natural perturbations such as ice-scouring, flooding, frequent wildfire, and insect infestations that result in a dynamic vegetative mosaic. In turn these diverse and productive seral stages provide excellent habitat for birds returning to breed in the summer. Only two dozen birds are considered resident in this area but with the onset of the intense subarctic spring nearly 160 species (including 17 raptors) are known to breed here.

For many raptor-watchers and biologists raised in the post-World War II era of widespread pesticide use and its dire consequences, the opportunity to observe healthy populations of American Peregrine Falcons in a wildland setting is only a dream. Rugged bluffs and layered outcrops tower above turbid waters along the heavily forested Yukon River corridor. This is a time-worn landscape that is by any measure outstanding peregrine habitat. The vast proportions of the country carved by "The Great River" stretch the human imagination and seem a perfect backdrop for the whistling of sickle-wings in determined stoops.