

DESTRUCTION OF THE PRAIRIE FALCON AT CALGARY, ALBERTA

by Kevin van Tighem, 315 Sharon Ave. S.W., Calgary, Alberta

In *Birds of Alberta* (1966) by Salt and Wilk there is a statement which says that ". . . the Prairie Falcon seems to be holding its own better than many other species of hawk." During the past two years several observations made by interested observers in the Calgary region have proven that there is by no means any reason for saying that the Prairie Falcon is faring well.

One eyrie at Bearspaw Reservoir, near Calgary, has been watched for several years by a small group of observers. In the period from 1963 to 1966 at least three Prairie Falcons were shot with .22 rifles by irresponsible people. In 1966 the falcons arrived and began frequenting the sandstone cliffs again, but early in the year the male was shot. After a few days a second tercel appeared and the pair successfully raised four young after a late nesting. In 1967 the birds arrived in March and were definitely established in the cliff area until well into April. At this time I saw several people in the area with guns and I was not surprised to find the tercel dead late in April. The falcon was soon joined by another male but in the middle of May the pair abandoned the site and have not been seen in the area since.

The majority of the falcons and other hawks killed in this area are shot in the early spring upon arriving. At this time the lake is still icebound and people can drive up from the city and cross on the ice to the cliff area. Another reason for the departure of the Prairie Falcons from the area is the increasing use by humans of the bay in which the cliffs are located. The cliffs are often explored by families and children who walk in from Calgary or come across the lake by motorboat or canoe. Although the eyrie itself is inaccessible the constant shouting and movement prevents the

falcons from remaining on the eyrie for any length of time.

There are other nest sites in the Calgary region besides this which are faring poorly too. At Bighill Creek near Cochrane two pairs of Prairie Falcons were found nesting in 1966. One nest contained four downy young; the other was destroyed by an egg collector. Ten occupied eyries under observation along the Bow River from Calgary downstream were also affected by irresponsible people. At least six were eliminated by amateur egg collectors or people with a mistaken compassion for baby birds; the other four contain from one to four young.

The great part of the damage inflicted upon the Prairie Falcon is done to people from the cities out for a day or a weekend who have no interest in protecting natural beauty. People upon whose property falcons nest appear to be among the few who realize that once destroyed these things can never be replaced.

As the inventions of science make man more destructive, the most notably affected birds are the raptors whose territories are often large, whose production rates low and susceptibility to maltreatment high. Pesticides cause infertility in eggs, pollution causes food sources to be poisoned and various new modes of transportation permit lawless and irresponsible people to reach out into the more remote regions where they cause the greatest harm. It seems strange that at a time when the public is becoming more and more concerned about the preservation of our natural heritage, laws concerning the shooting of hawks and the collection of their eggs and young should so seldom be enforced. Until some degree of official concern appears there is still a chance that birds like the Prairie Falcon and Peregrine Falcon will follow the Passenger Pigeon.