

PEREGRINE FALCON IN MANITOBA — AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Winnipeg has attracted attention recently because a pair of Peregrine Falcons nested for three consecutive years on the Delta Winnipeg Hotel as a result of U.S. and Canadian re-introduction efforts. This paper, however, deals exclusively with historic occurrences predating the Peregrine Falcon recovery project in Manitoba.

Since the earliest recorded sightings, the "Duck Hawk" or Peregrine Falcon in Manitoba is referred to as either a transient, occasional winter visitant or occasional summer resident. Although definite breeding records were lacking, it probably bred sparingly as it was recorded in summer.⁴ The present note records some breeding for the period prior to 1981.

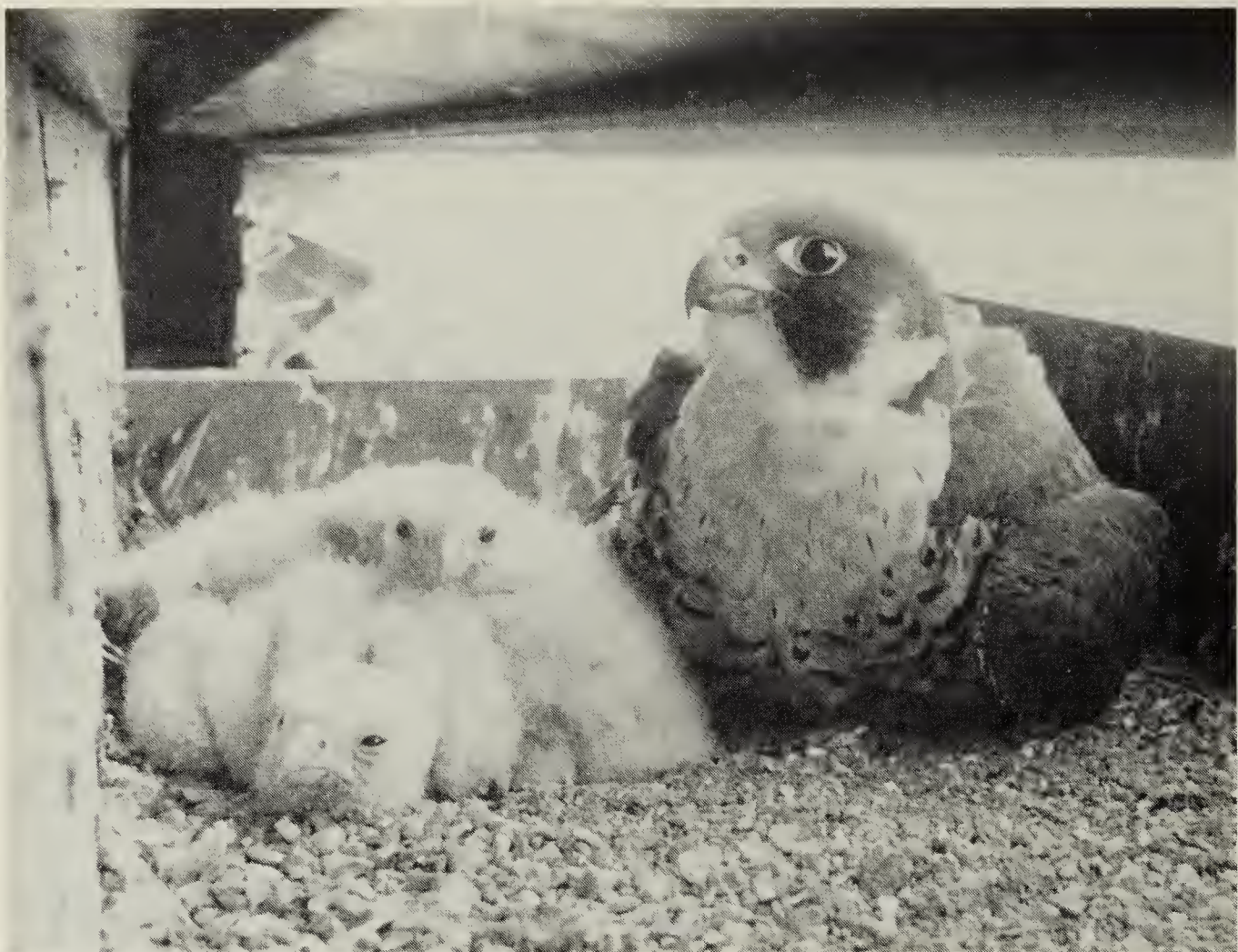
Northern Manitoba As early as 1880, Bell recorded a male peregrine, and Macoun listed two specimens obtained from York Factory (Figure 1).⁹ Taverner and Sutton called the peregrine at Churchill "a fairly common transient and summer resident; probably nests in suitable localities."¹¹ Although they did not find evidence of breeding, birds were seen and collected between 27 May and 11 June, and an adult male was regularly observed during the last week of June and the first two weeks of July in the Churchill area.¹¹

Jehl and Smith stated that although few records exist for the Churchill area, migrant peregrines usually arrive from 6 to 18 May and depart between mid-August and mid-September.⁷ "The virtual absence of summer records in recent years indicates that peregrines no longer breed in the Churchill area. Perhaps they nested as late as 1957, when Mrs. Beckett observed a pair courting near Cape Merry."⁷ In Bechard's review of historic nesting records, he states that only presumptive evidence exists that peregrines once occupied suitable sites along the Hudson Bay near Churchill.¹

A Peregrine Falcon nesting habitat evaluation was conducted for northern Manitoba in 1990.² Although no peregrines were observed, 33 potential nesting cliffs were recorded over the 3,438 km route.

Central Manitoba Shortt and Waller reported that the Peregrine Falcon was not common, but was well known to the Indians of Lake St. Martin who claimed to have found its nest on the limestone ridge at the north end of the lake.¹⁰

In "Chickadee Notes" (1948, No. 1400), Lawrence described peregrines nesting near Grand Rapids, and near Minaki, Ontario. Valentine McKay indicated strong understand-



Peregrine nesting on Delta Winnipeg Hotel, 1989

Robert P. Taylor

ing of the Peregrine Falcon's hunting habits and nesting behaviour. He goes on to describe several locations. "Owing to the Duck Hawk's habit of always nesting on an inaccessible ledge of a perpendicular cliff, it is hard for one to look into the nest to examine the contents. These hawks nest every summer on the limestone cliffs of Pony Island, near Selkirk Island, Lake Winnipeg and also just above the Demichage Rapids, where there is a high bluff called Anchor Point. Last summer [1947] I saw a nest on a ledge of a perpendicular limestone cliff near the Gill River on Lake Winnipeg. Both hawks were greatly excited and antagonistic to our presence and swooped down on us several times in a curve directly below the cliff. I presume that anyone trying to invade their nesting site would meet with violent opposition."⁸ (There were 35 other records in "Chickadee Notes." Table 1)

Western Manitoba There were several reports of migrating peregrines in the late 1800s, and migration records were listed for Portage la Prairie, Carberry and Two Rivers. One Peregrine Falcon was collected in its first plumage on 26 July 1884 near Carberry.¹³

O.G. Turner, Jr. collected two Peregrine Falcon eggs on 20 May 1887, from a nest 13.3 m above ground on the ledge of a small cliff near Gladstone, Manitoba. These eggs are in the museum collection of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, California. Egg size could not be used for identification since eggs of Peregrine Falcons are similar to those of Prairie Falcons. However, Bechard reported that the dark red colour of the eggs was typical of Peregrine Falcons so he judged the identification to be valid.¹⁶ It can be argued that a 13.3 m cliff near Gladstone, especially downstream along

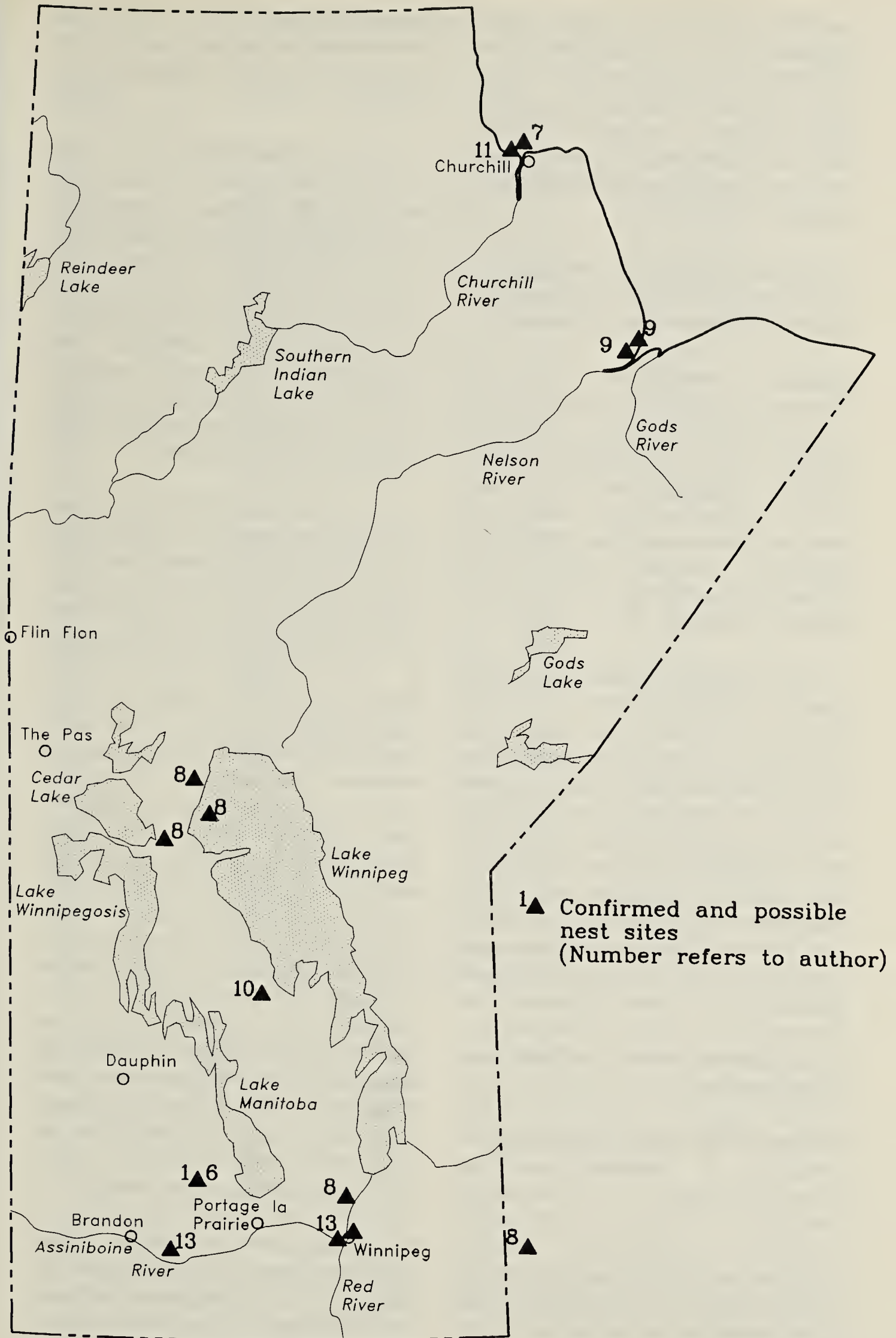


Figure 1. Confirmed and possible Peregrine Falcon nest sites in Manitoba.

the White Mud River, is not feasible. However, 20 km west and northwest of Gladstone, the topography is certainly rugged enough, supporting steep elevation changes of greater than 15 m along the course of creeks and other sites. The eggs were likely collected in this area.

Hochbaum called the peregrine an uncommon spring and fall migrant in the Delta Marsh region of Manitoba.⁵

Eastern Manitoba In the Pinawa-Lac du Bonnet area, Taylor classified the peregrine as a rare transient and occasional winter visitant. He suggested that it was unlikely peregrines had ever bred here as limited historical records of sightings occurred only during migration (i.e., 20 April-13 May; 31 August-1 October).¹²

A.G. Lawrence however, observed potential nesting locations in nearby Ontario and at least one active nest ("Chickadee Notes," No. 1400). "On the prairies, the Duck Hawk is noted usually in spring and fall following the migrating flocks of ducks and shorebirds, but we have found it in summer dwelling amongst the rocky headlands of the Lake of the Woods and Winnipeg River, and have seen a brood just out of the nest (first reported by W. Adams, Winnipeg) on Thompson's Island, near Minaki, Ontario," 33 km east of the Manitoba-Ontario border.⁸

Southern Manitoba Hine called the peregrine a "tolerably common summer resident" in the Winnipeg area.¹³

Lawrence ("Chickadee Notes," No. 497) mentions an immature peregrine being captured while asleep on a window sill of the Winnipeg Hydro warehouse on Arlington Street by P.

Stewart in September, 1930 (Table 1). It was photographed, banded and released. The photo appears in his column.⁸

In "Chickadee Notes" No. 1569, Lawrence wrote about an outing by the Manitoba Museum Association and the Natural History Society during the second week of June 1951, in which apparently a pair of peregrines was seen in the Stony Mountain area. They observed one peregrine kill and carry away a shorebird. "It was probably a female Duck Hawk as a male was seen over the slough in the afternoon."⁸

According to L.T. Simmons, a pair of peregrines nested on a ledge near the top of the King Edward Municipal Hospital on Churchill Drive overlooking the Red River about 1960. The late Jack McIntyre, then administrator of the hospital, told Simmons about the nesting at a time when the birds were still present. He swore Simmons to secrecy in the belief that otherwise the birds would be disturbed. Simmons said he saw two downy chicks resting on the bare bricks of the ledge which was at the southeast corner of the building overlooking a vegetable garden. Simmons said he saw pieces of pigeon remains scattered on the nest ledge, especially sections of the forewing. The ledge was "messy" so that the chicks were not altogether resting on bare brick. Simmons saw the nest ledge with the two young on two separate occasions, with the chicks in both downy and advanced states (R.W. Nero, pers. comm., 1989).

Simmons also said that a single peregrine took up residence for some time at the Legislative Building in the 1930s, roosting daily on the ledge at the base of the Golden Boy. Grant Churcher, who ran the

Table 1: PEREGRINE RECORDS IN MANITOBA 1921-55
IN "CHICKADEE NOTES" BY A.G. LAWRENCE

Column Number	Location	Date d/m/y	Observer
10	Gimli	23 May 1921	C.G. Harold
33	Aweme	28 Sep 1921	N. Criddle
113	Oak Lake	14 May 1923	H. Battersby
163	Whitewater Lake	30 Apr 1924	C.G. Harold
217	Oak Lake	16 May 1925	H. Battersby
268	Oak Lake	04 May 1926	H. Battersby
317	Portage la Prairie	17 Apr 1927	James Cowan
318	Oak Lake	17 Apr 1927	H. Battersby
319	Treesbank	26 Apr 1927	N. Criddle
369	Hillside Beach	05 Apr 1928	F.J. Rogers
371	St. Vital, Winnipeg	20 Apr 1928	H. Mossop
372	Oak Lake	10 May 1928	H. Battersby
378	Winnipeg	24 May 1928	L.T.S. Norris
425	St. Vital, Winnipeg	11 May 1929	H. Mossop
427	Oak Lake	16 May 1929	H. Battersby
479	Delta	24 May 1930	C.L. Broley
497	Winnipeg	24 Sep 1930	P. Stewart
577	Winnipeg area	10 Apr 1932	R.M. Watt
578	Hillside Beach	09 Apr 1932	F.J. Rogers
631	St. Francois Xavier	17 Apr 1933	C.L. Broley
683	Whitemouth	22 Apr 1934	V. Latta
688	East Bay	24 May 1934	E. Robinson
719	Viriden	23 Dec 1935	J. Pritchard
739	Hillside Beach	18 May 1935	F.J. Rogers
786	City Park, Winnipeg	29 Mar 1936	R. Tidmus
844	Whitemouth	12 May 1937	V. Latta
1052	East Bay	19 May 1941	E. Robinson
1207	Delta	30 Apr 1944	H.A. Hochbaum
1250	Rosenfeld	? Sep 1944	T. Wallis
1254	Lac du Bonnet	30 Apr 1945	A.G. Lawrence
1569	Stony Mountain	? Jun 1951	Nat. His. Society
1616	Haywood	01 May 1952	H. Mossop
1666	Marquette	03 Apr 1953	H. Mossop
1717	Legislature, Wpg.	08 Apr 1954	G. Parfitt
1724	Churchill	18 May 1954	E. Beckett

government greenhouse, Ralph Fryer and Angus Shortt also knew about this falcon (R.W. Nero, pers. comm., 1989).

Gardner called the peregrine a rare transient in the Oak Hammock Marsh region. He has recorded 38 sightings since 1953, dating from 30 April to 30 May, and from 13 August to 30 September.³ Summer records do not exist for peregrines in the area after 1953, but the Stony Moun-

tain pair was probably observed at Oak Hammock in 1951, because the naturalists mention a slough, and St. Andrew's Bog was the most prominent one in the area.

Discussion Although the data are limited, the available evidence suggests that at the time of initial settlement up until the early 1950s, the Peregrine Falcon was a rare breeding resident of Manitoba.

Lawrence's record of peregrines nesting in the Grand Rapids area seems plausible. Pony Island, Demich-age Rapids and the Gill River areas are suitable nesting locations, and to this day have not been closely examined for nesting peregrines. The pair nesting on the King Edward Municipal Hospital in the 1960s also appear valid. Finally, the egg set collected from the Gladstone area provides the first positive evidence of nesting of peregrines in Manitoba prior to 1989. The Thompson's Island fledglings seen by A.G. Lawrence near Minaki, Ontario, just 33 km east of the Manitoba-Ontario border late in the 1940s, is another creditable and supporting record.

A report of courting peregrines near Cape Merry as late as 1957, six reports of summer residents (one of which suggests nesting) and three other sources suggest that there is at least presumptive evidence that peregrines nested naturally in suitable locations in Manitoba in the historic period.

One reason peregrine eyries were not recorded more frequently in Manitoba may be the lack of suitable nesting habitat in southern Manitoba where the vast majority of bird observations are made. Also, in the recent past (after 1950), the Peregrine Falcon populations crashed because of pesticides (DDT in particular) and, therefore, one would not expect to find many, if any, peregrines in Manitoba from 1960 to the mid-1980s.

The available evidence indicates that historically, the Peregrine Falcon should be regarded as a rare but indigenous nesting species in Manitoba.

Acknowledgements

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