

## Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Principles for Raptor Conservation

### *Peregrines and pigeons: their interactions and ways to reduce them*

The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is a near-cosmopolitan diurnal raptor that is known to feed upon more than 300 species of birds worldwide. Both feral and domestic Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*), including homing pigeons, are included in the diets of peregrines whenever the species co-occur and the former are readily available.

Short of removing peregrines from an area, there is no way to completely eliminate peregrine predation on pigeons. There are, however, several ways to reduce the extent of this predation. Most techniques and protocols work best in combination, and the efficacy of each depends upon local circumstances.

- Many instances of peregrine predation on homing pigeons occur during the peregrine's breeding season, usually within several miles of a pair's breeding site. Pigeon fanciers can reduce peregrine predation on their flocks by moving their lofts away from peregrine nest sites, and by reducing, so far as possible, the availability of feral pigeons to peregrines in the area.
- One way to reduce predation during homing pigeon races is to shift the location of release sites so that pigeons do not fly through "peregrine country" on their way home.
- One way to reduce predation on valuable pigeons is to release low-value birds first and to release high-value birds later after the peregrines have fed.
- Wintering peregrines are by far more mobile than breeding peregrines and, as such, are far more likely to pose a threat to concentrations of pigeons. Many peregrines, however, are territorial in winter, with most determining the site of their wintering territory shortly after their arrival on the wintering grounds. One way to reduce peregrine predation during the non-breeding season is to limit the availability of pigeons to peregrines in late autumn and early winter when individual falcons locate and establish their winter territories. The best way to do this is to keep homing pigeons in their lofts as soon as peregrines arrive in the area, and to safely reduce (i.e., no poisoning or unattended trapping), so far as possible, the availability of feral pigeons to peregrines in the area. The entire process requires a coordinated effort, is labor-intensive, and can take as many as several weeks to achieve. It is important to initiate the process as soon as the peregrines arrive, as it is far easier to induce peregrines to move to another site before they become accustomed to a location than it is to try to induce them to leave an area once they have become established.

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