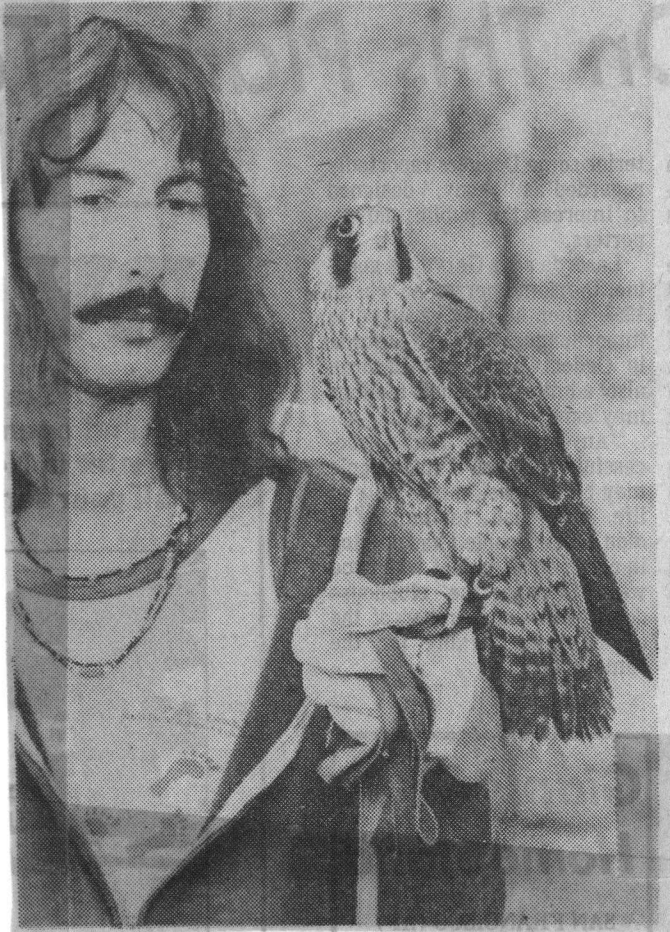


# Effort To Save The Peregrine Falcon



**LEFT -** Handler Merlyn Felton shows off a young Peregrine Falcon. The Predatory Bird Research Group at UCSC is working to assure the bird species is saved. There will be 14 of the falcons at facility at the campus, which will make it possible to start breeding immediately.

Members of the California Conservaton Corps have helped construct the bird research laboratory on the UCSC for only about \$8,000, thanks to buidling supply donations from Big Creek and San Lorenzo lumber companies, and food supplies from Cal-Cruz Hatchery.



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Dogs have run most of the deer out of the Santa Cruz Mountains; trappers and citizens have disposed of much of the other wildlife that used to wander through back yards. And even the hawks and eagles once exempt from man because of their high flight have been brought to near-extinction.

Take the Peregrine Falcon. This marine bird, which once roamed the air currents along the coasts and inland rivers and lakes by the thousands, has almost become a victim of pesticides.

The Peregrine Falcon feeds on smaller birds. The smaller birds feed on plant seeds and insects. And man protects his plants with pesticides, especially DDT. Since the falcon is at the top of the food chain, the DDT is concentrated in their diet, and the result is they lay thin-shelled eggs which often don't hatch.

Like some other birds with the same thin-egg shell problem, the shortage of replacement offspring would eventually bring them close to extinction.

"We're fighting that," said Brian Walton. "We estimate there are only about 50 pairs of Peregrine Falcons left in the wild in the U.S."

Walton is coordinator of the Predatory Bird Research Group at UCSC, which is one of only two university research sanctuaries for predatory birds like falcons and hawks in the U.S.

The other is Cornell University, which has just made a gift of seven of the rare Peregrines to UCSC, and plans to send four more "because they are friends of mine, and because they know we're doing a good job and have the facilities," said Walton.

With the three Peregrines already at UCSC, the total of 14 birds will make it possible to start breeding almost immediately—three years ahead of schedule.

And when the first eggs are carefully hatched by man, and the chicks placed in a wild falcon's nest, the replenishment of an endangered species will be under way.

"We plan to release just about all our Peregrine offspring into the wild," said Walton.

To house the Peregrines, as well as Prairie Hawks, Harris Hawks, and Gyrfalcons also being raised at UCSC, the Predatory Bird Research Group is raising up a large aviary in an abandoned quarry on the UCSC campus.

With the help of young carpenters and construction men from the California Conservation Corps, the building is going up for an astonishingly low cost. "We estimate it will only cost us about \$6,000," said Walton.

Of course, Big Creek Lumber Company and San Lorenzo Lumber have donated large amounts of lumber and plywood for the building, and Cal-Cruz Hatchery is supplying much food for the birds.

Some of the plywood-walled pens have 15-and 20-foot ceilings to let the hawks and falcons try their wings. Almost all of the birds there were raised in captivity, though a few injured birds, including some shot and wounded by humans, are being nursed back to health.

Fortunately for the endangered birds, nesting hawks and falcons aren't choosy about whose eggs are in their nests—or even whose fledglings, for that matter.

The UCSC group plunked a Red-Tailed Hawk nestling into a nest of two falcons at Morro Rock near San Luis Obispo. The bird's own three eggs never hatched (one broke). Unhappily, the Red-Tailed Hawk died, too. But in went two Prairie



A Peregrine Falcon

Hawk nestlings. They were adopted and survived. Then a Peregrine chick was added, along with a baby Prairie Falcon after the two other birds had become fledglings (were old enough for flight). The two parents were such good ones they didn't mind the switching, and the Peregrine was still at Morro Rock at last checking.

This kind of manipulation is necessary for creatures facing extinction, and the scientists will sometimes take fragile eggs from wild nests, hatch them, and often put the chicks back.

There are only five known nests in the Central Coast region where Peregrine Falcons still breed.

Breeding in captivity helps a lot. There is an 80 percent mortality rate for young birds in the wild, and in captivity the chances for survival are far higher.

Since DDT was banned as a pesticide in agricultural use in the early 1970s, the falcons and other birds have started to make a comeback. In 1970, there were only two known Peregrine nests in California. Now there are 20. "In a few years, we hope there will be several hundred," said Walton.

It may not seem like much to those of us concerned over using our wild areas for housing and for other purposes. But the sight of a Peregrine floating in the sky in dappled blue-gray and white plumage is a reminder of human responsibility to other life. It will make someone like Walton glad, you can be sure.