

BIRDS Contamination fine leads to grant for Santa Cruz predatory bird group

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From staff and wire reports

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency said today it was requiring importers of a pesticide contaminated with DDT to pay \$325,000 to the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Restoration Group for enhancement of the peregrine falcon population in California.

The importers will have to pay the money to the UC Santa Cruz-based group in order to help it continue its practice of taking thin-shelled eggs from falcon nests, hatching them and then returning the new-born birds to their parents.

There are only about 80 breeding pairs of the peregrine falcon in California, Oregon, Washington and Nevada, all but five or six in central California.

About six years ago it was estimated that only about 25 pairs of peregrine falcons existed in California. The increase in population is attributed to the success of the UCSC breeding program, one of only two centers in the country that has developed a successful captive breeding program of endangered birds on a large scale.

The peregrine falcon was placed on the endangered species list in 1968 after the use of pesticides, particularly DDT, had decimated the population as it fed on animals that were contaminated with pesticides. The result was that the falcons were laying thin-shelled eggs that often did not hatch.

The EPA ruling was part of a decision earlier today to allow the

pesticide dicofol to be sold in this country. It is the first time the EPA has permitted any material containing DDT to be sold. The agency said it believed that users would turn to more dangerous pesticides that might kill beneficial insects as well as harmful mites if dicofol were banned entirely.

Dicofol will not be permitted to be used after March 31, 1989, if it contains more than 0.1 percent of DDT and related compounds, the agency said.

DDT was banned in 1972 because it was devastating to many wildlife populations, including several bird species that could not reproduce because their eggshells were too thin to last through the hatching process.

DDT is the raw material for making dicofol.

EPA said when it began its review of dicofol in 1984 about 10 percent of the material consisted of DDT and related compounds.

Currently, the contamination is about 2.5 percent and that would be the interim permitted contamination limit.

Dicofol is made in Italy by Rohm & Haas Co. of Philadelphia and in Israel. It is imported by Rohm & Haas and Makhteshim-Agan (America) Inc. Two million to three million pounds are used in the United States each year to kill mites, about two-thirds of it on citrus and cotton, mostly in Arizona, Florida, Texas and California.