

Peregrine

Scientific Name: *Falco peregrinus*

Irish Name: Fabhcún gorm

The Peregrine is a raptor, or bird of prey, and is found on all continents except Antarctica and high on the Arctic. It mostly hunts and feeds on other birds, such as pigeons, starlings, ducks, waders and seabirds.

Peregrines are widespread throughout Ireland. They breed on coastal and inland cliffs, more so on the north, west and south of the country as there are less suitable nesting sites on the east coast. They can sometimes be seen in estuaries during the winter months, chasing waders.

When away from the breeding site they are quiet birds but make a loud cackling sound when alarmed.

Peregrines are incredible hunters. Thought to reach speeds of at least 240km/hour when hunting, they are the fastest animal on the planet. They can strike their prey with such force they often kill on impact.



Courtesy of Alan D. Wilson www.naturespicsonline.com

FACT FILE

Wingspan: 95-115 cm.

Colour: Same for male & female. Dark blue-grey upperparts & white underparts with dark bars.

Food: Other birds such as pigeons, starlings, ducks, waders & seabirds.

Eggs: 2-3 per clutch.

Habitat: Prefers mountains & coastal cliffs but can also be seen in towns & cities.

Population Recovery

The peregrine population suffered a huge crash in Europe during the 1960s, due to pesticide poisoning. The pesticide that was responsible for the decline was banned and the population has been recovering slowly ever since.

In Ireland the peregrine population is not considered to be under threat.



Courtesy of Robbie Murphy

The Peregrine has a heavy body, a medium length tail and broad, bowed wings. It has powerful legs, sharp talons and a short hooked bill. Its wingspan is about a metre in width (95-115 cm).

Family

The breeding season is from February onwards. The female peregrine, which is larger than the male, lays about 2-3 eggs in a clutch. A clutch is a group of eggs laid at the same time and incubated together. A peregrine may have a second clutch in a season if the first clutch fails. Eggs are incubated for about 29-32 days and it takes about 40 days before they are able to fly. It will be another couple of months before they become independent of the parents. Peregrines belong to a group of birds known as falcons. Falcons are small to medium-sized raptors, that have pointed wings and which can fly at speed. Other falcons include the Kestrel, Merlin and Hobby.



Courtesy of Robbie Murphy