

Nesting protection sought for rare peregrine falcons

ROSEBURG, Ore. (AP) — The U.S. Forest Service will try to protect the nesting site of a rare pair of peregrine falcons and their two young found in the Umpqua National Forest this summer.

The peregrine falcon is an endangered species, and the site is believed to be "one of the few successful nestings in Oregon in recent times," U.S. Forest Service wildlife biologist Ray Zalunardo said.

"Finding a peregrine falcon pair in Oregon that has successfully mated is unique," he said, adding that another pair nesting since 1979 in Crater Lake National Park has not reproduced.

The Forest Service and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife are making plans to protect the sensitive nest site during the January-through-August nesting season.

The agencies have been watching the birds — found over Memorial Day weekend by a trio of bird watchers — all summer. For the birds' protection, the Forest Service has withheld information on the exact site of the nest.

The peregrine falcon population began to decrease rapidly in the 1950s. Its decline has been tied to the widespread use of the now-banned pesticide DDT which

caused the egg shell to be thinner than normal and reduced the bird's fertility. By 1970, the peregrine falcon was extremely rare.

Efforts to save the bird from extinction have increased its numbers. Young falcons are raised under domestic conditions, but are never exposed to humans because they would become tame.

Biologists feed such birds using a glove disguised as a peregrine falcon's head. This method, "hacking," takes six weeks to two months before the young can be introduced into the wild and be expected to survive.

The peregrine falcon has been used in the sport of falconry since medieval times. The bird was prized for its unique hunting pattern, circling high in the sky searching for prey.

Once a peregrine falcon spots its prey, it pulls its wings tightly into its body, forming a V. This allows the bird to dive at the prey at speeds of up to 200 miles per hour.

The peregrine falcon is about 18 inches long, and has a wingspan of about 43 inches. It is blue above and white below with blackish-brown bars. It prefers to nest on a shelf of a steep cliff. It may be found worldwide.