NOTES ON THE NESTING HABITS OF THE
PEREGRINE FALCON.

BY

H. A. GILBERT.

It is difficult to generalize about the nesting habits of the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco p. peregrinus*) because no bird appears to be more variable in its habits, but I will try to sum up the experience which I have gained at various times during the last twenty years of the nesting habits of some twenty-eight pairs of Welsh birds—eleven of which nest on inland cliffs.

The Peregrine appears to be very attached to its home and, though it may leave its nesting haunts in autumn and winter, at times it pays frequent visits to its nesting sites—indeed, often roosting on its home cliff all through the winter. About the beginning of February both birds begin to be in evidence more and more until, with the advent of March, they have taken up the position for the nesting season. The hen at this time frequently sets up a querulous, long-drawn squeal, and for at least a fortnight before she lays her eggs remains at home continuously—being fed during that time by her mate, who does all the hunting.

At this period the hen visits the nesting ledge at frequent intervals and often has her meal delivered to her thereon by her mate. Both birds are jealous, and strike at Ravens and Gulls incessantly; kills begin to pile up and tell-tale masses of feathers begin to be visible here and there near the nesting ledge. The hen may change her mind and go to another ledge after appearing to have chosen one definitely. In fact, two scrapes at least are nearly always made by the hen bird, though these scrapes may both be on the same ledge.

The Peregrine demands a certain amount of soil on a ledge among which to make her scrape, and I have never seen eggs laid on the bare rock, though I have seen several nests on ledges overlaid by pebbles and small pieces of rock without earth. Of course, the old nest of a Raven (*Corvus c. corax*), or Buzzard (*Buteo b. buteo*) may be chosen, but then, if possible, the old nest will be very old indeed—just a flat platform of soft material in which the bird can make a scrape. In fact I know of one pair of birds which always occupy old Ravens’ nests, apparently because there are no earthy ledges, merely bare rock, on that particular range of cliff; and again, in contrast, I have several times known a Raven’s nest of the year to be occupied by the Peregrine after the Raven
THE FALCON AND HER EYRY.
Three young 4-5 days old.
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had been robbed. In these cases the Peregrine had been robbed also, and these were all second attempts. Sometimes on these occasions the Peregrine scrapes out the wool lining of the Raven's nest. Most ledges have a sheer, straight drop immediately below them, and nearly all are facing north or have some shelter from the sun for the young birds—such as a deep recess or a big rock. A particular site is seldom occupied two years in succession if the young have been successfully reared, because a Peregrine ledge, from which the young have flown, is a stinking shambles and even as late as the following March is a disgusting-looking place owing to the decaying bones and feathers which are littered all over the place. I have stood on ledges of cliffs made of rock so hard that the ledge had probably remained unaltered for generations and been amazed at the masses of bones thereon. Digging in the soil of such ledges one finds layer upon layer of bones and such ledges have probably been used by Peregrines for scores, and even hundreds, of years. On such a ledge I have seen the eggs laid in a scrape dug out of heaped-up piles of old bones.

My experience is that Peregrines begin to sit earlier inland than on the sea coast, and I should say that April 9th is the date on which most inland birds are sitting, while coast birds do not begin until about April 15th. The earliest date on which I know a Peregrine has been found sitting is April 4th, but this year I found on April 15th a Peregrine's nest on which the bird must have begun to sit on April 1st at the latest. I have also known birds which have not begun to incubate until April 27th (and I have heard of others which did not begin until May). If the first clutch of eggs is removed while fresh the bird lays again and begins to sit on the 22nd day after being robbed. I have notes of four such instances and a friend of mine has supplied me with five more.

The number of eggs laid seems to vary according to the district, but here in South Wales, as far as my notes go, half the nests hold four eggs for a first clutch. Practically all the other nests have three, clutches of two being quite rare, while I have only seen one egg as a full laying twice. As regards five eggs in a clutch I have never seen it myself though I have seen three authentic self-taken examples.

The cock bird certainly incubates the eggs at times. I have seen a cock do so on three occasions, though on two of them the incubation was by the same cock bird.

The food consists chiefly of Pigeons and Jackdaws and many small birds. I have seen a Carrion-Crow twice and
Chough three times—though I do not think an undue proportion of these birds are killed. Several pairs on the sea coast were found to be feeding very largely on small rabbits. I have also unimpeachable information of a Peregrine being put off a freshly killed Buzzard which it was eating. A few pairs of sea-coast birds take to raiding farmyards for chickens during June and in this area a scythe blade can often be seen stuck on a pole as a charm against the Peregrine!

Finally, I consider that a Peregrine’s nest is a very difficult one to find once the bird has begun to sit and provided that the sitting bird is so placed that she cannot see the searcher. I know several birds which cannot be put off by stones and even by gun shots.