



Prairie & Peregrine Falcon Monitoring

Pinnacles National Park

Resource Brief

Above: A Prairie Falcon fledgling stretches its wings on a cliff ledge. Nesting on inaccessible cliffs offers Prairie and Peregrine Falcons valuable protection from ground-dwelling predators.



Right: A Peregrine Falcon fledgling.

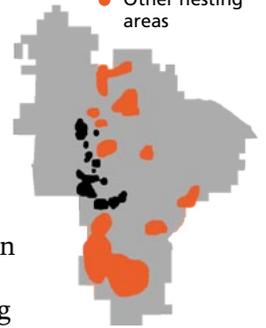
Below: NPS staff setting up a raptor advisory sign. Voluntary advisories based on current monitoring data let rock climbers know which areas to avoid to help the park protect nesting falcons. All photos by Gavin Emmons.



Why Are Prairie & Peregrine Falcons Important?

Rock climbers value access to the spectacular cliffs that Pinnacles National Park is known for, but they are not the only ones. Prairie Falcons are the most abundant raptors, or birds of prey, in Pinnacles. They nest on the park's cliffs at the highest densities known anywhere. Peregrine Falcons, listed as Fully Protected in California, also nest on cliffs at Pinnacles. Both falcons are hunters that eat small mammals, birds and reptiles from surrounding habitats. As a result, their success at Pinnacles can be a good indicator of the condition of ecosystems throughout the park.

- Pinnacles NP
- Rock climbing & nesting areas
- Other nesting areas



Prairie and Peregrine Falcons are also very sensitive to human disturbance, especially while they are nesting. The National Park Service began monitoring Prairie Falcons in cliff-nesting areas near rock climbing routes in 1987 to protect the birds from disturbances while still allowing climbers to scale as many routes as possible. By 2003, monitoring had expanded to all suitable cliff-nesting sites in the park.

Why Do We Monitor Prairie & Peregrine Falcons?

- To track changes in the numbers of falcon pairs in suitable cliff-nesting areas inside and outside of core rock climbing areas
- To identify changes in nesting success as measured by the number of nestlings per nest hatched and fledged inside and outside of core rock climbing areas

How Do We Use the Monitoring Data?

- To inform where and when advisories discouraging climbing and off-trail hiking should be issued to protect the falcons and maximize climber access
- To help predict the causes of changes in falcon numbers and nesting success

What Have We Learned?

Although numbers of Prairie Falcon pairs and nesting success vary, the overall trend appears stable. Additionally, most visitors appear to be complying with advisories. Peregrine Falcons returned to Pinnacles in 2004 for the first time in 48 years. Since then, a pair has nested each year in a former Prairie Falcon territory. This may suggest that the falcons compete for cliff habitat, and that Prairie Falcon numbers could decline if more Peregrines re-occupy historical territories. So far, the data is too limited to be conclusive in this regard. A second Peregrine pair arriving in 2013 has been sharing a large cliff with resident Prairie Falcons.

To learn more, visit www.sfnps.org/prairie_falcons or [/peregrine_falcons](http://www.sfnps.org/peregrine_falcons) Summary by Jessica Weinberg McClosky, May 2014.

For More Information

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http://www.sfnps.org/prairie_falcons

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