

## DIURNAL FALL MIGRATION OF PEREGRINES IN NORTH MISSISSIPPI

Fred J. Broerman            and

W. Marvin Davis

983 S. Line Street  
Grenada, Mississippi 38901

308 Lewis Lane  
Oxford, Mississippi 38655

The existing record of migratory observations on the Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) in Mississippi is essentially limited to earliest and latest dates seen. They seem not to have been reported in migratory flight. There have been few efforts to observe and record raptors in passage through Mississippi. Those observations that have been made involved mainly Broad-winged Hawks (*Buteo platypterus*). The greatest number of sightings of the Peregrine in Mississippi occur on the Gulf Coast, where they occur in winter as well as in migration season. Even there the highest number for a single day was only three birds on 3 January 1976 in Jackson County (Toups and Jackson 1987). Single Peregrines are recorded regularly during spring and fall migration in north Mississippi, but have not been noted in evident migratory flight (notes of G.C. Knight, W.M. Davis), despite their being a diurnal migrant (Palmer 1988:343).

At approximately 07:30 on 5 October 1996, FJB was at the south end of Grenada Dam in Grenada County at a parking area just north of the Visitor's Center. He saw two Peregrines flying southward toward him from the north end of the dam. They passed by and continued south out of sight. The first bird was an adult; the second, following ca. 100 m behind the first, was an immature. During the subsequent period of about 70 minutes after the passing of those two falcons, an additional four immature Peregrines and one adult were observed in leisurely flight even with the level of the top of the dam or slightly above the road on top of the dam. They would occasionally deviate from direct flight to circle in order to gain additional altitude to permit a stoop in seemingly playful mock attacks--a behavior well known for this species (Palmer 1988:368)--directed at Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auratus*) in the water or at crows (*Corvus* sp.) on the dam.

After the first two birds, all others were observed with no other falcon in sight

simultaneously. Viewing distances were sometimes as close as 25 m, adequate to be certain that none of the seven birds was a Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) or a Merlin (*Falco columbarius*). All appeared to be of the *anatum* subspecies. Observations were made with 7x35 mm binoculars under partly cloudy skies. The southeast wind was fairly strong from across the lake so that the birds were flying largely into the wind. However, their ease of flight suggested that they were gaining advantage from an updraft rising as the wind struck the face of the dam.

Later the same day, FJB drove across the dam at 12:15 and 17:30, but saw no falcons. On the following day, 6 October, he watched for hawks at the same location from 07:50 to 09:00 continuously in similar weather, but saw no Peregrines. However, one immature Peregrine flew along the dam at 10:00 as did a Merlin at 11:50.

Peregrines will cross wide bodies of water, even for extensive distances (Palmer, 1988:343; Kerlinger 1989:339). Despite that fact, it appears that in this case the birds chose, when they encountered the lake, to follow the shoreline to the west as the wind direction favored. Reaching the end of the lake, they evidently turned south again following the dam and so passed the observer. The question might be raised as to why such a movement of falcons occurred on a day when wind direction seemingly more opposed than aided migration-- i.e., it was not a following wind in the direction of migration. However, the strong flight capacity of Peregrines makes them less influenced by wind conditions than are weaker fliers and the soaring broad-winged raptors (Kerlinger 1989:65).

#### LITERATURE CITED

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