

NOTES ON THE STATUS OF THE PEALE FALCON

WITH ONE ILLUSTRATION

By ALLAN BROOKS

THE RANGE of the Peale Falcon (*Falco peregrinus pealei* Ridgway) as given in the A. O. U. Check-List, 1910, reads "Pacific coast region of North America from Commander and Aleutian islands to Oregon. Breeds throughout its range." On the strength of this all peregrines from the northwest coast are ascribed to *pealei* by most collectors. As the majority of these birds are indistinguishable from eastern falcons there is a natural tendency to discredit the form *pealei*.

There is, however, a well marked form resident in the Queen Charlotte Islands (and on the southern islands of the Alaskan coast?) west through the Aleutian chain to the Commander Islands. North of this, over nearly the whole of Alaska, only *Falco peregrinus anatum* occurs. I have seen no breeding birds from Vancouver Island, but the winter birds and migrants there are *anatum*. Two breeding adults from the northwestern coast of Washington, that I have seen, are also indistinguishable from *anatum*, as are all the specimens I have examined from the interior. The juveniles of all these are dark, but not more so than dark juveniles from the Atlantic coast. I have not seen the type of *pealei*, described from a juvenile bird, but the characters assigned to it are inconstant when applied to any series of northwestern birds.

On the Queen Charlotte Islands the Peale Falcon is probably more abundant than peregrines are anywhere else in the world. On North Island in the breeding season one is never out of hearing of the birds. Sometimes three broods of fledglings can be heard calling from one vantage point, and probably thirty-five pairs nest on the twenty-five miles of coast-line of this small island alone. Here is an excellent opportunity to study the variation in the young; and while all are dark, few show the absence of rufous margins to the feathers of the mantle, supposed to be the diagnostic feature of *pealei*. Many of the juveniles also show the buffy-colored head in contrast to the dark body; each brood, however, is true to one type. The only character that may possibly separate juvenile *pealei* from dark juveniles of *anatum* is the hair-line striping of the throat and chin; this extends right up between the rami of the mandible in all the juveniles I have in my own collection, some fifteen in all; while in all juvenile *anatum* that I have been able to examine the upper portion of the chin is immaculate.

The breeding adults from the Queen Charlottes are as a rule very heavily and handsomely marked below, especially in the females. Some show even as much barring as in the ultra-typical birds from Bering Island collected by Stejneger, this barring extending right up onto the jugulum in the form of heavy "tear drops" and even bars. Such birds constitute the extreme of differentiation of the *peregrinus* group, only equaled by the strongly characterized *melanogenys* of Australia.

The only Atlantic specimen that I have seen that has a heavily marked jugulum is an adult female in the National Museum from the mouth of the Whale River, Ungava. This bird might well represent *pealei*; but whether a straggler of that form, or only a mutation of *anatum*, or, quite possibly, *peregrinus* from the Old World, is only of course conjectural. In the British Museum there are no specimens of *pealei*; two birds purchased from an American collector for that form are only *anatum* from central Alaska, the male in fact ultra-typical of that subspecies with a large portion of the lower surface immaculate.

My conclusions as to the range and characters of the heavily marked peregrine of the North Pacific now called *Falco peregrinus pealei* may be summarized as follows. It is characterized by a very heavily marked under surface in the adult and possibly greater size than in *Falco peregrinus peregrinus* and *F. peregrinus anatum*. The markings in the adult female extend up onto the jugulum in the form of tear drops and bars, not hair lines or narrow lanceolations as in other forms of *peregrinus*. In the adult male the markings are not so pronounced, but the whole lower surface is usually dusted with dark gray in addition to the bars. There is very little rufous on the lower surface in either sex. The young are very dark and may or may not have rufous edgings to the feathers of the mantle; they can be matched almost exactly by dark juveniles from the Atlantic coast.

The range is the North Pacific islands between latitude 50° and 55°, from the Skeena River mouth (British Columbia) to the Commander Islands (and adjacent coast of Kamchatka?). Probably resident throughout its range.

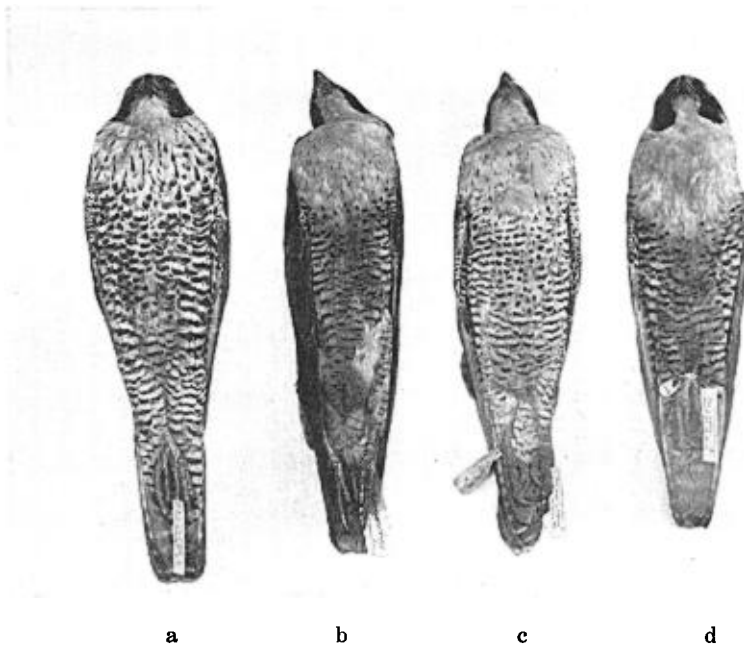


Fig. 29. FOUR SUBSPECIES OF PEREGRINE FALCON:

- a. *Falco peregrinus pealei*, ♀ adult; Queen Charlotte Ids., B. C.
- b. *Falco peregrinus peregrinus*, ♀ adult; Islay, Scotland.
- c. *Falco peregrinus callidus*, ♀ adult; Astrakhan.
- d. *Falco peregrinus anatum*, ♀ adult; Gardiner's Id., New York.

If this characterization be accepted, the form will require a new name, as it is quite distinct from the breeding form of the Washington-Oregon coast, the type locality of *Falco peregrinus pealei*. Adults and young from this region can be exactly matched in any series of eastern *anatum*.

The situation is very similar to that of the goshawks of the west. The characters on which the subspecies *Astur atricapillus striatulus* and its synonym *henshawi* are based are only those of age, and the juveniles are only slightly if at all differentiated from eastern birds. But on the Queen Charlotte Islands and the islands of the lower Alaskan coast occurs a dark form of the goshawk with an extremely dark colored juvenile. Migrants from northern Alaska of the ordinary *atricapillus* type migrate through its range, just as light-colored peregrines of the typical *anatum* type may be found migrating through the breeding range of the heavily spotted peregrine now known as *Falco peregrinus pealei*.

MEASUREMENTS OF FALCO P. PEALEI FROM THE QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS

	Wing	Tarsus	Middle toe without claw
Average of 4 males.....	335	48	48
Maximum	340	52	49
Minimum	332	46	47
Average of 7 females.....	372	57	56.5
Maximum	377	60	58
Minimum	367	54	54

Besides the material in my own collection I have been able to examine the series in the British Museum, the U. S. National Museum, the American Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, as well as several other collections with smaller series. These notes are not written with any idea of finality but with the hope that they may induce a better conception of the situation.

Nanaimo, B. C., November 29, 1925.