

Big Birds, Big City

Walk around New York City, and you may see some people looking skyward in awe. They might be admiring the city's high-rise buildings, or they might be admiring peregrine falcons instead.

These **majestic**¹ birds of prey, which were on the verge of extinction, have made a comeback across the United States. Some have even moved to New York City. The falcons aren't alone in calling the Big Apple home. Bald eagles have also moved into the neighborhood.



World Almanac for Kids

Some peregrine falcons have moved to New York City.

Death by DDT

Peregrine falcons are the fastest creatures in the air. They can chase their prey at speeds of up to 200 miles per hour.

The birds were nearly wiped out in the 1960s from exposure to a **pesticide** called DDT. A pesticide is a chemical designed to kill insects and other pests that damage plants and crops. Scientists didn't realize in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s that DDT also harmed birds and other animals.

According to biologists, DDT made the eggshells of peregrines and other birds thin and fragile. The shells broke before the baby peregrine falcons were ready to hatch. By 1970, there were only 39 known nesting pairs of peregrine falcons in the lower 48 states.

¹ **majestic**: stately and dignified; noble

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Road to Recovery

The U.S. government banned DDT in 1972. A year later, Congress passed the federal **Endangered Species Act**. The law protected many animals that were in danger of dying out, including peregrine falcons.

Today, more than 2,000 pairs of falcons nest nationwide, including at least 20 couples in New York City. The first two falcon pairs moved to the city in 1983.

Peregrine falcons usually nest on high cliffs. In and around Manhattan, though, the birds have built nests on bridge girders, church steeples, and tall buildings. Peregrine falcons seem to like New York City, according to biologist Chris Nadeski. There are plenty of pigeons and other birds to dine on. Plus, the bridges and skyscrapers provide high, open perches, similar to the perches on cliffs. Bird-watchers and bridge workers monitor the falcons with web cameras.

In 2005, a 10-week-old peregrine falcon left its nest too soon and crash-landed on a street beneath the Brooklyn Bridge. A falconer gave the dazed bird a clean bill of health and released it.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Biologists moved four bald eagles from Wisconsin to New York City.

Eagle Eye

Bald eagles can also be seen in New York City now. In the early 1700s, the birds were a common sight in and around New York. But egg collectors and pesticides almost destroyed the entire bald eagle population in the United States.

In 2004, biologists took two male and two female **eaglets**² from northern Wisconsin to Manhattan. The scientists built a platform for the birds in a tree in northern Manhattan near the Hudson and Harlem rivers. Biologists brought four more eagles to New York from Wisconsin in 2006. All have been flying near the Hudson River in the Bronx.

² eaglets: baby eagles

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The goal of the reintroduction program is to encourage the birds to nest and breed in the region, once again making it their home. To keep watch over the birds, scientists fitted them with radio-tracking devices.

"We're bringing our nation's symbol back to New York," the city's former parks and recreation commissioner, Adrian Benepe, told *National Geographic Today*.

Birds of a Feather	
Falcon	Bald Eagle
Length: 18 to 20 inches	Length: 3 feet
Wingspan: 36 to 45 inches	Wingspan: 6 feet to 7 feet
Maximum weight: 2 pounds, 11 ounces (Females are about one-third larger than males.)	Maximum weight: Females can weigh up to 14 pounds. Males can weigh up to 10 pounds.
Food: other birds	Food: mostly fish, but sometimes snakes and small birds
Life span: 10 to 12 years	Life span: 30 years
Did you know? A falcon's eyesight is eight times more powerful than a human's eyesight.	Did you know? The bald eagle can see more than a mile away.