

FALCO PEREGRINUS PEALEI IN OHIO—AN ERROR¹

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ABSTRACT

A specimen of peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus* from Ohio, originally erroneously assigned to the Pacific Coast population *F. p. pealei*, is an individual of the nearly expirant eastern forest-inhabiting *F. p. anatum*.

An immature female peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) taken in Ottawa County, Ohio, in 1957, and preserved as number 5235 in the University of Cincinnati Biology Museum collection, was cited by Kemsies (1959) as an individual from the population named *F. p. pealei*. In the course of a comprehensive survey of the species, based on a study of over 2,000 specimens, more than was then available, it seemed advisable to reexamine this specimen, because birds from the *F. p. pealei* population in North America are normally resident only on the Pacific Northwest coast, from the islands off British Columbia northward, and in the Aleutian Islands (although they regularly do wander southward along the Pacific Coast into California). This individual thus seemingly constituted the only record of this subspecies for Ohio, and more importantly, the first record east of British Columbia or the Sierra Nevada mountains for this coastal geographic race (American Ornithologists' Union, 1957).

Upon examination, the specimen proved not to be the Pacific Coast form *Falco peregrinus pealei*, but rather an average example of the geographic race *F. p. anatum* (*sensu stricto*) (White, 1968b) that formerly inhabited the forests of eastern North America. The pertinent criteria by which the individual was judged to be *Falco peregrinus anatum*, rather than *F. p. pealei* (see Beebe, 1960, and White, 1968a and 1968b), are as following.

1. The specimen has the entire body overwashed with the rufous color characteristic of *F. p. anatum*, whereas *F. p. pealei* is characteristically overwashed with hues of yellow that frequently show mixtures of a grizzled or slatish color.
2. The specimen has the distinctly reddish, although small, dorsal feather-edgings characteristic of *F. p. anatum*, which in *F. p. pealei*, when present, usually are of a yellowish to buff-ocher color (although some examples from Forrester Island, Alaska, show decidedly reddish dorsal feather-edgings).
3. The rich, deep-brown color of the darker areas are characteristic of *F. p. anatum*, while *F. p. pealei* characteristically has a more gray- to slate-colored tone to the brown, even in the palest individuals. The characteristic grayed tone of the brown is a good diagnostic character of *F. p. pealei*, but is also found in some coastal Asian population.

The measurements of the specimen, though of less importance because of their overlap in specimens of *Falco peregrinus anatum* and of smaller individuals of *F. p. pealei*, are considerable below the mean of *F. p. pealei* and much nearer those of eastern *F. p. anatum*. I determine the measurements of the specimen's wing to be 356 mm, as opposed to 368 ± 1.17 SE (range 352–383) mm (N=27) for immature females of *F. p. pealei*, and 360 ± 1.38 SE (342–372) mm (N=19) for immature females of *F. p. anatum*. The specimen's tail measured 180 mm, as opposed to 190 ± 1.23 SE (175–218) mm (N=31) in *F. p. pealei* and 183 ± 1.98 SE

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(170–193) mm (N=17) in eastern *F. p. anatum* (measurements, in part, from White, 1968b).

Although the specimen does have a generally very dark, coarsely marked plumage, particularly on the underparts, the diagnostic character cited by Kemsies (1959: 539), the markings are not as dark as examples of *Falco peregrinus anatum* from known eyries in Massachusetts, Quebec, Utah, and Colorado. The degree of darkness is *not* an absolute criterion for *F. p. pealei*. One should not be too typological in analyzing peregrines by single morphological characters, i.e. color, size, etc. The different populations are best defined by groups of characters in concert. There are even examples of *F. p. pealei* as pale as some far northern peregrines of tundra origin (which are noted for their paleness), although not with the same tone or hue of brown, nor with the same color of overwash as the northern birds in comparable states of wear. Caution should also be taken when examining specimens of peregrines, as individuals from different populations are transported far and wide by falconers and then subsequently lost to the wild.

Because of the abstractness in the subspecies concept, there are some inherent ambiguities involved in allocating isolated individuals to named geographic races, but the present case has a measure of importance and significance. *Falco peregrinus pealei* has a certain morphological distinctiveness and color which make it usually recognizable and which reflect, to a degree, factors in its biology. Perhaps most important is the fact that *F. p. pealei* is a coastal and insular form, apparently having differentiated and evolved *in situ* in that humid, usually overcast, environment (White, 1968b). *Falco p. pealei* apparently does wander extensively at sea, but this form of peregrine appears not to be found back inland far from a sea coast. The easternmost known valid record of a specimen found inland from the coast appears to be that reported by Jobin (1952) of a bird collected about 200 miles east of the coast in British Columbia, but west of the Cariboo and Columbia mountains (specimen examined by me). There are no records for Alaska away from the coastal environment (Gabrielson and Lincoln, 1959). In the state of Washington, this falcon is recorded east to Lake Washington (Jewett, *et al.*, 1953), while in Oregon the easternmost specimen (not examined by me), is from Portland (Gabrielson and Jewett, 1940). All the specimens I have examined from California were associated with the coastal environment and were found within 20 miles of the coast at the time of collection.

The fact that there does not yet appear to be a valid record of the geographic race of the peregrine, *Falco peregrinus pealei*, east of the Rocky Mountains in British Columbia, or in the Cascade and Sierra Nevada mountains, should bespeak something of its biology, environmental affinities, and movements. The record as it now stands, that of being recorded from Ohio, obscures that biology. I thank Mr. Emerson Kemsies, University of Cincinnati, for reading a draft of this note.

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