

PLATE 4

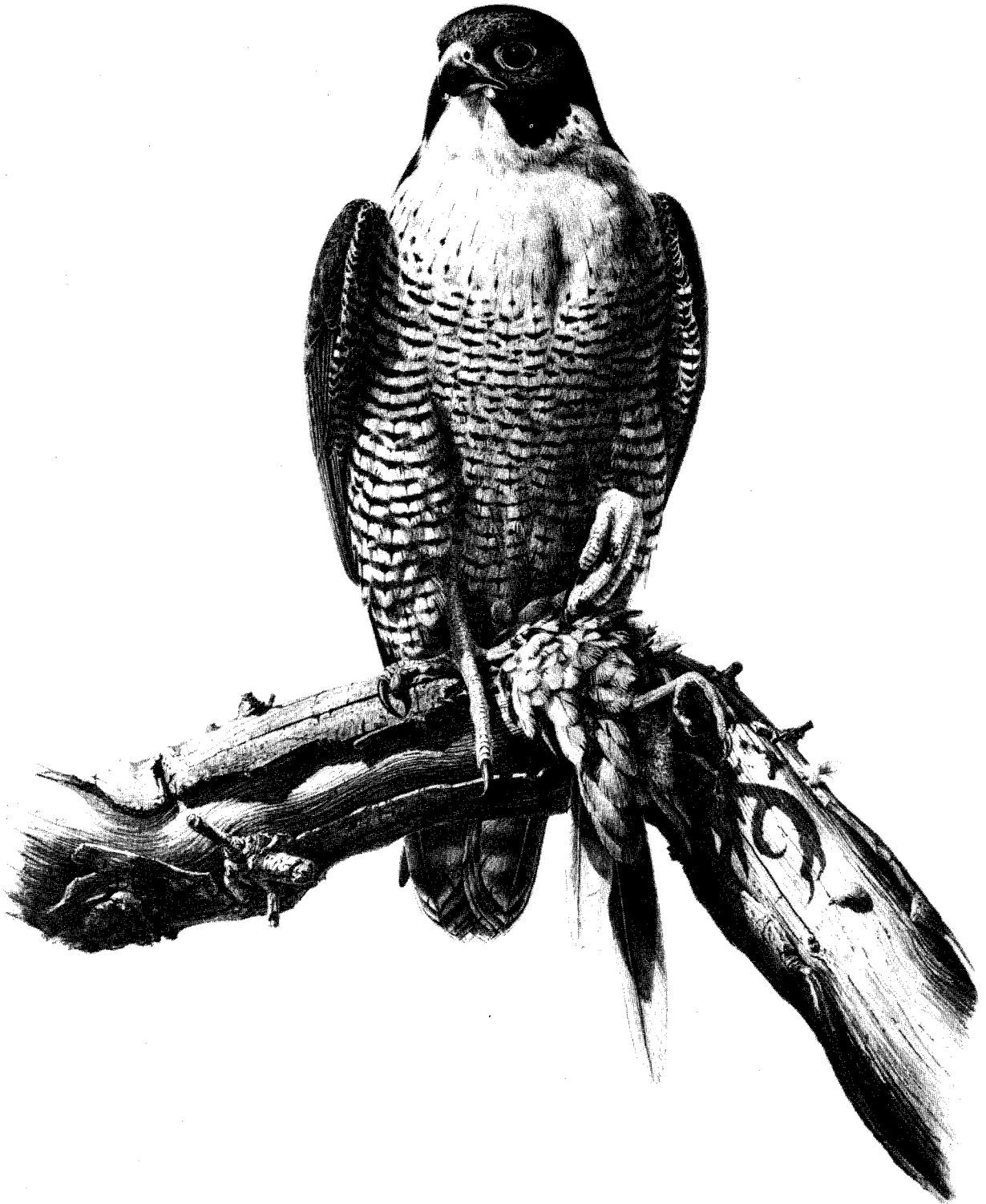


Plate 4. Female Peregrine Falcon with prey.

(pencil sketch by Peter Trusler)

## INTRODUCTION

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'For many centuries the Peregrine Falcon has been a symbol of speed and audacity in nature.' So begins the entry on the Peregrine Falcon in the Reader's Digest *Complete Book of Australian Birds*. No more apt sentence could describe man's fascination with this bird.

Man's long association with the Peregrine Falcon and his respect for its hunting prowess are exemplified in the practice of falconry. Although no longer a fashionable or legally sanctioned pastime in Victoria, many of the techniques and terminology of this medieval 'sport of kings' still persist. Today we still have undesirable and illegal relations with the Peregrine. Egg-collecting and shooting, by sometimes well-meaning but ill-informed individuals, have reduced populations in some regions. More seriously, the insidious effects of chemicals on animals at the end of a food chain have in many parts of the world threatened the survival of the Peregrine Falcon.

Fortunately, many people are now concerned for the future of wildlife. Conservation needs a background of biological knowledge and the need for such knowledge gave rise to the studies described in this supplement.

When Mr W. B. Emison joined the Fisheries and Wildlife Division of Victoria in 1973 as Senior Research Officer in charge of the Wildlife Survey Unit, he brought with him experience in research on falcons gained in his native North America. Though the Unit gathered data on the occurrence and abundance of many species of wildlife in different regions of Victoria, he encouraged some staff (Messrs K. Norris and W. Bren) to take a special interest in raptors, particularly the Peregrine Falcon. He was fascinated by the way in which this cosmopolitan species had adapted itself to the Australian environment, specially its use of trees as nest sites, in contrast to the cliff eyries of North America and Europe.

An initial survey was carried out in 1975 (Emu 77:

86-87). This led the Fisheries and Wildlife Division to invite Professor C. M. White of Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, USA, to Victoria in 1976 to initiate a more detailed survey of the Peregrine Falcon in Victoria.

Professor White brought with him one of his post-graduate students, Mr S. G. Pruett-Jones, and together with staff from the Fisheries and Wildlife Division they studied the distribution, breeding, feeding and movements of the Peregrine and the impact of chemicals on it. The results of the 1976 study indicated that further work was necessary and in 1977 Professor White returned with Mr Pruett-Jones, and another post-graduate student, Mr W. R. Devine. This expansion of the project was made possible only by a grant from the M.A. Ingram Trust and by assistance from the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Australian Government Analytical Laboratory at Seaton, SA.

The papers in this Supplement to *Emu* report the results of much of the work conducted on the Peregrine Falcon in Victoria in the period 1975-79. They have enabled us to gain a better understanding of the status of the Peregrine in Victoria and to conclude that, at present, its population is large and stable. Though we can be optimistic about the Peregrine in Victoria we must not become complacent. We shall continue our studies so that any significant change in the population of Peregrines is detected and remedial action taken if required.

Finally, though due recognition is given to the authors and to the agencies (M. A. Ingram Trust, Fisheries and Wildlife Division, Ministry for Conservation, the Graduate School and Department of Zoology of Brigham Young University and Sigma Xi (the Scientific Research Society of North America) that provided funds and made the research and this publication possible, the major credit for the program must go to Mr Emison.