

The Fastest Bird On Earth In Grand Ronde



Set Free — Jo Elam (inset left) releases a Peregrine Falcon that she found stuck in fence in Grand Ronde. The falcon was taken to an animal clinic and treated for its wounds before going to the Audubon Society of Portland, where Wildlife Care Center Director Bob Sallinger (inset right) put the bird through several weeks of rehabilitation. Sallinger's theory was that the falcon was injured while diving for prey. A dead goose was found near the falcon. Falcon prey ranges in size from sparrows to geese.

■ A Peregrine Falcon was found caught in a fence near the Willamina Middle School in Grand Ronde.

By Toby McClary

On an afternoon in mid December, community member Jo Elam was on her daily routine and noticed something stuck in a fence as she stopped at the post office. After further investigation, this "something" happened to be a male American Peregrine Falcon.

"It looked like a goose of some sort from a distance," said Elam.

With the help of two employees

the breeding cycle of these falcons."

After the injuries had healed, the bird was taken to the Audubon Society of Portland where he met Wildlife Care Center Director Bob Sallinger.

"The falcon was in very good health when I got him," said Sallinger. "The vet did an excellent job at setting the fracture."

The falcon was in Sallinger's care

ing," said Elam. "I look for it every time I go to the post office."

Peregrine falcons came close to extinction in the late 1960s with only two known nesting sights in California, and none in Oregon or Washington. By 1970, they had vanished entirely from all states east of the Mississippi River. They are making a comeback now, having 89 known sites in the state of Oregon alone. These birds of prey were just recently taken off of the federal Endangered Species Act, but remain on the state of Oregon's endangered species list.

Several pairs of peregrines have made nests on some of the bridges in Portland, including the Fremont, St. Johns and the George Abernathy Bridge. Peregrines have made homes on the Fremont Bridge since 1993 and 18 falcons have hatched and become adults since then.

Photos by Toby McClary



Comeback Story — Peregrine Falcons were almost extinct in the late 1960s. Widespread use of a pesticide known as DDT caused peregrine egg shells to become thin and crack during incubation. By 1975, there were no known nesting sites in the state of Oregon and only two in the state of California. Due to the ban of DDT, these birds are on the road to recovery. There are now 89 known nesting sites in the state of Oregon alone. Peregrine Falcons are the fastest species on Earth and can dive at speeds of 200 miles per hour to catch their prey.

"We pay attention to each individual falcon, as well as the total population," said Sallinger. "I hope to see a thriving population in the next 20 years and I think we are headed in the right direction."

"We were dealing with the world's fastest animal. It's comparable to rehabilitating a world class athlete."

~ **Bob Sallinger**

Wildlife Care Center Director of Audubon Society

at the Grand Ronde Sanitary District, Elam freed the bird from the fence. She then took the bird to the post office where Postmaster Phil Burris found a box large enough to transport it to a veterinary clinic.

"While everyone was searching for a camera, it just so happened that I had a camera phone," said Burris as he showed off the picture.

Elam then transported the bird to McMinnville Animal Hospital where it stayed for a couple of months being nursed back to health. It had a broken wing and a large puncture wound to the chest.

"I visited the bird a few times while it was in the clinic," said Elam. "I care about the bird and think this makes a huge impact on

for about eight weeks to undergo physical therapy and limited exercise. Sallinger moved the bird through a series of flight cages to retrain him on jumping, perching and different flight patterns.

"We were dealing with the world's fastest animal," said Sallinger. "It's comparable to rehabilitating a world class athlete."

The American Peregrine Falcon is the fastest species on earth and can dive at speeds of over 200 miles per hour trying to land its prey.

After many weeks of supervision, Sallinger felt that the falcon was rehabilitated enough to release. On February 11, in the field behind Willamina Middle School, Sallinger put the falcon back in the hands that found it, (Elam), and set it free.

"I wonder how that falcon is do-