

## PEREGRINE FALCON PREYS ON NORTHWESTERN CROW

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About midday on 11 October 2008, while at home gardening, I heard Northwestern Crows (*Corvus caurinus*) making a ruckus in Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*) trees in the vicinity of my backyard. The crows remained relatively motionless but were intently watching and screaming at something. I managed to climb high enough to peer over my 2.1 m fence to see a large bird on top of another darker but smaller bird. My immediate thought was “get the camera” and “will I have enough time to cover the 122 m to get a photo for identification.” I slowly walked towards the birds and as soon as I could see them

clearly I began taking photographs. The head of the feeding bird came up frequently with a mouth full of feathers and then it continued to feed. Meanwhile the crows in the oak trees were still screaming and when I was about 10.7 m away I discovered why; one of their kind was being eaten. The feeding bird glanced occasionally at the other crows between eating spells. It was also becoming aware of my presence because of the noise from my camera shutter.

The predator took another bite, looked around, and struggled off with its prey down the field getting just enough altitude to fly under some tree branches and over a 1.2 m fence. When reviewing the images I realized that the predator was either a hawk or a falcon. Later I compared them with coloured illustrations in Godfrey (1986) and Sibley (2000) and decided that the bird in question was either a juvenile Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) or less likely a rare Prairie Falcon (*F. mexicanus*).

Since I was not confident with my identification I took some prints to the *Wild Birds Unlimited* store at the Shelbourne Plaza in Victoria for help. As it happened, R. Wayne Campbell was at the store purchasing bird seed and he identified the bird as a juvenile Peregrine Falcon (Figure 1). When asked about camera equipment used I did mention that the images were taken handheld with a Canon 20D and Canon Zoom EF 100-400 mm L IS lens. No speed light was used by preference as I do not like to use a flash on any species.



**Figure 1.** Juvenile Peregrine Falcon holding its prey, a Northwestern Crow, in a playing field in residential Victoria, BC. 11 October 2008 (Rosemary Bishop). BC Photo 3662a.

The Peregrine Falcon has been recorded in the Greater Victoria area every month of the year but is most often observed from late August through mid-October (Campbell et al. 1990). In North America the species feeds primarily on birds (77-99% representing 429 species), from passerines to small geese (Sherrod 1978, White et al. 2002). In British Columbia no quantitative overview of the falcon's diet is available for either coastal or interior populations. During the summer breeding months, however, it is well known that Peregrine Falcons feed primarily on small to medium-sized marine birds along the outer coast (Beebe 1960) and Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*) and European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) in coastal urban environments (Dundas and Breadon 1980-81). During the non-breeding season foods taken are less frequently observed, and reported, but shorebirds may be an important food source (e.g., Campbell 1976). While the Northwestern Crow has not previously been reported as a food item for Peregrine Falcon in British Columbia, Paine et al. (1990) found it was an important part of the falcon's diet at Tatoosh Island on the Olympic Peninsula in coastal Washington State.

The mean weight for Northwestern Crow in British Columbia ranges from 364 g (females) to 410 g (males) (Verbeek and Butler 1999) and the laboured flight I observed of the Peregrine Falcon with the Northwestern Crow carcass (Figure 2) suggests that the weight is near the limit of the falcon's carrying capability.



**Figure 2.** Juvenile Peregrine Falcon flying with a Northwestern Crow over a playing field in residential Victoria, BC. 11 October 2008 (Rosemary Bishop). BC Photo 3662b.

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### About the Author

Rosemary enjoys wildlife and especially photographing everything from bugs to birds. Macro nature photography was the most interesting but the cost soon became prohibitive using film. She now uses digital cameras and often shoots for identification and the photo record.