

A Most Unexpected Visitor

The warm, breezy day was interrupted by screeching and rattling, which grew louder and louder. By the time I got to the cage, my bird was flapping his wings for all he was worth. There on the side of his cage, holding on with four claws on each foot, was a bird at least five times the size of my green, peach faced love bird.

The pot holder in my hand became a weapon to shoo him out the French doors, which stood wide open next to the cage. Getting the large bird to leave the yard was another matter. He flew to the back fence and sat for a while. Soon he came back to the window and sat on the flower box. He peered inside. First in one window then another. The bird was in no hurry to leave. He wanted lunch and my love bird was his selection.

His thin, grey and white feathers, blew gently in the breeze. He didn't look so fierce from such a close view. His black eyes with yellow rings around them looked in at me, as I looked out at him. Such a close-up view of a peregrine falcon was not an everyday occurrence. I guessed he was still quite young because of the thin feathers.

I began to wonder how this animal had found my little bird inside our house. My grandsons were there and wanted to learn more about peregrine falcons, so we did some research. We learned that peregrines have very good eyesight. They can dive from high up in the sky and reach their target. Though they feed on smaller birds, they also eat rats and species that can be harmful to man. They are not wasteful. They only feed when they are hungry. They use their hooked beaks, and their talon feet, or claws, to grab, pierce and kill their prey. Many years ago, they were trained by man to help him hunt. A few people, called falconers, still train them. The sport dates to the Far Eastern countries, many years before Christ was born.

Peregrines almost became extinct in the 1960's because of the chemicals used in the fields and water. When they ate small animals and fish that had these chemicals in their bodies, they laid eggs with very soft shells. When the birds sat

on their nests, the eggs often cracked. Some governments have passed laws not allowing those chemicals to be sprayed on the land any more.

Peregrine falcons like to live on cliffs with meadows below. Because we lived close to a lot of mountains and meadows, we often saw them soaring, gliding and diving. They are beautiful to watch. After that when I saw them, I made sure my love bird was inside the house with the door closed.

Dedicated to my grandchildren who have been my inspiration to write stories for children (a true story). Grandma Jaye