

Does Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* breed in Cuba?

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El 27 de enero de 1998 se observó una pareja de *Falco peregrinus* presentando actitudes de alimentación de cortejo, caza cooperativa y vuelos de despliegue en la costa de La Havana, Cuba. Estas actitudes sugieren que la pareja se encontraba nidificando, o intentando nidificar en las cercanías. Si bien ha sido mencionado como nidificante en Cuba por Raffaele *et al.*⁴, no existen registros confirmados en la isla, o el resto de las Antillas. De todas maneras existen condiciones aparentemente favorables para la nidificación de la especie en Cuba y sectores de Jamaica.

A pair of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* was observed from land pursuing a Royal Tern *Sterna maximus* a short distance out to sea off the sea-front of Havana, Cuba on 27 January 1998. Each of the pair made repeated attacks on their intended prey (not by stooping but in low-level flapping pursuit). This continued for c.10 minutes, with, on a number of occasions, the tern being forced to hit the water in its efforts to evade capture. Ultimately, the falcons were unsuccessful and returned to land.

Here, the male was seen to immediately feed the female in flight after collecting an unidentified prey item, probably a bird, from a food cache stored on the roof of one of the seafront hotels. The male dropped the prey which was then caught by the female. The pair was observed for a further 30 minutes, while they performed a bouncing aerial display around the tower blocks in the area. There was clearly no hunting purpose to the flight, but this appeared to be typical pre-season pair-bonding behaviour. The fresh breeze probably aided their manoeuvring.

Bond¹ and Downer & Sutton³ describe Peregrine as a winter visitor to the West Indies, which occurs throughout this region. Cuba clearly is well placed to receive birds migrating to and from North America, Havana being only 170 km south-west of Key West, Florida, and Pinar del Río Province in the west of the island only 210 km north-east of the Yucatán peninsula, Mexico.

That migrant birds from North America and Greenland reach Cuba² and elsewhere in the West Indies is undisputed; what is, however, is whether Peregrine Falcon could actually breed in the West Indies.

Raffaele *et al.*⁴ report one Cuban breeding record but provide no further information, and there appears to be no immediately apparent reason why it should not breed there on a regular basis, except on historical grounds, i.e. it never did breed there. Conditions certainly appear suitable for breeding there (and in neighbouring Jamaica, which also lacks a large breeding falcon), with an abundance of prey and the existence of an almost limitless number of potential nest sites. Summer temperatures may be a limiting factor, although breeding takes place in

many other parts of the world with a similarly torrid climate, e.g. Oman, Java and Sri Lanka. Peregrine Falcons were also observed making attacks on feral pigeons *Columba livia* in Havana and there is no doubt that conditions are favourable to permit the species to breed in the city. Urban nesting Peregrine Falcons are a well-documented phenomenon elsewhere in the world and, in addition to apparently ample prey, Havana has many tower blocks suitable for Peregrine Falcons to nest on.

According to Cramp & Simmons², display-flights are largely confined to the nesting territory and its immediate vicinity during the breeding season, while Ratcliffe⁵ describes how co-operative hunting between the sexes is often followed by display flights, especially early in the courtship cycle. The behaviour of the pair observed in Cuba—courtship feeding, aerial display and co-operative hunting—is strongly indicative of breeding close by. Egg-laying is likely to take place in February at this latitude and further observations may indeed confirm nesting, even if in fact the pair observed constitutes a pioneering one.

References

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