

REINTRODUCTION OF CAPTIVE-BRED PRAIRIE FALCONS IN CALIFORNIA—1976

by

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In recent years there has been an increase in raptor captive-breeding programs throughout the country. However, there have been very few attempts to reintroduce captive-bred birds of prey into the wild (Olendorff and Stoddart 1974). Fyfe (Olendorff and Stoddart 1974) and Cade et al. (1974, 1975) have successfully reintroduced captive-bred Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) nestlings in Canada and Colorado, respectively. The successful reintroduction of two captive-bred female Prairie Falcons during the summer of 1976 reported herein is the first such project in the State of California.

During the spring of 1976, Gary A. Beeman of LaFayette, California, raised twelve Prairie Falcons in captivity. Two were donated to Robert Malette of the California Department of Fish and Game for release. On 9 June 1976 Carl Thelander and Brian Walton of that Department placed the two female falcons in an eyrie located near Newell, California. The birds were approximately 13–14 days of age. Each was banded on the right leg with a Fish and Wildlife Service band. I was assigned by the California Department of Fish and Game to observe them.

The eyrie was occupied at that time by one naturally bred female nestling of approximately the same age. Both adult falcons were also present. The nest cliff has in the past supported two pairs of Prairie Falcons (Wenzel pers. comm.), but only one adult pair occupied the site in 1976. Other raptors nesting on the surrounding cliffs included a pair of Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) and a pair of Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*).

Follow-up observations showed that the reintroduced nestlings were accepted by the parent falcons. Direct and indirect feeding of the young by the adults was noted on several occasions. The wild-bred female and one of the female captive-bred nestlings fledged on 1 July 1976. The other captive-bred female fledged two days later. After fledging the young falcons stayed close to the nest cliff for two weeks as their flying and hunting abilities improved. At my last observation, two of the young falcons were observed foraging for themselves.

Literature Cited

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