## **Peregrine Falcon Recovery**

## **By Sarah Stock**

In November of 2009, the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) was delisted from the California threatened and endangered species list, 10 years after it was removed from the federal endangered list. This striking recovery in the Yosemite area and throughout most of the world is due in large measure to the ban on the use of DDT (Dichlorodiphenyl-trichloroethane).

Beginning in 2009, through funding from the Yosemite Conservancy, Yosemite initiated a parkwide peregrine falcon breeding survey (the first since 1995), which will continue into 2011. This project documents the success story of peregrine falcon recovery in Yosemite National Park.

Knowing the locations and breeding status of historic and current eyrie (nest) locations is essential for implementing protection measures, such as minimizing disturbance from rock climbing and other recreational activities, and from aircraft during park flight operations. Findings from the surveys continue to inform wildlife management and wilderness protection to ensure protection of the recovering peregrine falcon.

Results from the surveys have confirmed an increase in the park's peregrine falcon population and indicated significant progress in recovery of the species. Throughout the park from March-



Yosemite National Park began a peregrine falcon breeding survey in 2009 that will continue into 2011.

August 2010, park staff detected presence of peregrine falcons at 16 cliff sites. Repeated behavioral observations at these locations revealed 10 pairs, including nine breeding pairs that collectively fledged 17 young. In 2010, the record for the number of active eyries increased to eight, one up from the previous year's total of seven eyries. The most exciting discovery was the re-occupation of the historic "North America Wall" eyrie on El Capitan, where peregrine falcons were discovered nesting in 1978 after a 37 year absence. Another highlight occurred at Hetch Hetchy where one pair produced four fledglings, the largest number of young ever recorded from one nest in Yosemite. Overall, these findings represent a more than two-fold increase in the peregrine's population size in Yosemite since the last time that park-wide surveys were conducted in 1995. The 2010 surveys also revealed insights into other nesting birds of prey. Three active Golden Eagle nests, one Osprey nest, and one Bald Eagle Nest were discovered and documented.

Also in 2010, park staff monitored behavioral responses of breeding peregrine falcons to helicopter activity within the vicinity of their eyrie sites. Along with climbing route closures, airspace closures are also established beginning March 1 to protect breeding pairs of peregrine falcons. Disturbances to nesting peregrine falcons can result in nest failure if adults are flushed from the area for long periods of time, making the young susceptible to predation and temperature extremes.

Study results will be used to make recommendations to park management on how to reduce any potential disturbances at known breeding sites. Recommendations may include revised seasonal climbing closures established in the Superintendent's Compendium, and revised restrictions on aircraft use in the vicinity of active peregrine sites. Peregrine data from Yosemite will also be provided to the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to contribute to state and national monitoring efforts of this recovering, high-profile species. By 2012, a comprehensive report of all past Yosemite peregrine data and reports will be compiled to assess the longterm population trend and address ecological factors that are important for promoting a healthy peregrine population into the future.

6 YosemiteScience