

# Peregrine Falcon breeding in the Namib Desert

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The Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* is listed as "vulnerable" in the 2nd ICBP Red Data Book (King 1981) and "rare" in the South Africa Red Data Book - Birds (Brooke 1984). The species is probably represented by less than 100 breeding pairs within the boundaries of South Africa. The race breeding in southern Africa, *F. p. minor*, occurs throughout tropical Africa but is nowhere common (Steyn 1982). This note reports one of the first records for a desert-breeding pair of Peregrine Falcons.

In April 1984 a single adult Peregrine was seen in the Ugab River Gorge in the Skeleton Coast Park (R. Louit, pers. comm.). On visiting the locality on the evening of 10 October we found a pair calling loudly at our presence. The larger female landed on a cliff ledge, while the male, which had perched higher, called "w-e-e-e-e" continuously. On 15 October, nestlings were heard calling from the ledge, and their presence was confirmed on the 24th by scaling the cliff. Two nestlings were present (Fig. 1) on the sandy, southeast-facing ledge about halfway up the 200 m high cliff. By 16 November they had both fledged successfully. The only other currently known breeding locality for Peregrines in Namibia is from the Waterberg, a large inselberg in the central thornveld savanna area of the country, where 14 pairs have been located (Brown & Cooper in press).

The record reported here is of interest for two reasons. First,



Fig. 1. Peregrine Falcon nestlings on their sandy nesting ledge, about halfway up a 200 m high, southeast-facing cliff in the Ugab River, Skeleton Coast Park. ©CJ Brown.

Steyn's (1982) review states that the presence of water within the Peregrine's environment is a regular feature of this falcon's habitat. This was not so in this case; the Skeleton Coast breeding site receives less than 100 mm of rain per year and the only water in the vicinity is some 5 km to the west, which consists of a shallow sandy pool surrounded by reeds. This is probably too far to be of much importance to the falcons. Second, Tarboton & Allan (1984) postulate that Peregrines are rare in southern Africa because they are competitively excluded by Lanner Falcons *Falco biarmicus*; only where nesting cliffs are very high or cliffs overlook continuous woodlands can the aerial hunting methods of the Peregrine be more efficient than the diverse (cussorial) hunting methods of the Lanner. In the Skeleton Coast Park, Lanner Falcons are uncommon and only one breeding pair is known (Bralne in prep.). The deeply incised river gorges support relatively large populations of swifts, as well as some pigeons and doves which use the river courses as passageways to the waterholes. Prey are thus concentrated in the dry river courses with birds moving daily to and from the water. Opportunities for aerial pursuit from the high nesting cliff would thus be ideal for the Peregrines' mode of hunting.

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