

FEATURE ARTICLES

LONG-RANGE MOVEMENTS AND BREEDING DISPERSAL OF PRAIRIE FALCONS FROM SOUTHWEST IDAHO

KAREN STEENHOF^{1,3}, MARK R. FULLER¹, MICHAEL N. KOCHERT¹, AND KIRK K. BATES²

¹*U.S. Geological Survey, Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center, Snake River Field Station, Boise, ID, 83706*

²*Boise State University, Raptor Research Center, Boise, ID, 83706*

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³E-mail: Karen_Steenhof@usgs.gov

Abstract. From 1999–2003, we tracked movements of adult female Prairie Falcons (*Falco mexicanus*) using satellite telemetry to characterize long-range movement patterns and breeding dispersal. We radio marked 40 falcons from April–May on their nesting grounds in the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area in southwest Idaho. All falcons with functioning transmitters left the Snake River Canyon from late June through mid-July. Most headed northeast across the Continental Divide to summering areas in Montana, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Dakotas. Prairie Falcons stayed at their northern summer areas for 1–4 months before heading to the southern Great Plains or to southwest Idaho. The Great Plains was a key migration pathway. Important wintering areas included the Texas Panhandle and southwest Idaho. Most falcons completed their seasonal migrations within 2 weeks. Use of widely separated nesting, summering, and wintering areas appears to be a strategy to exploit seasonally abundant prey resources. Most falcons had three or fewer use areas during the nonbreeding season, and falcons showed a high degree of fidelity to their use areas during each season. At least 21 falcons returned to nest within 2.5 km of where they nested in the previous year, but one falcon moved to a new nesting area 124 km south of her previous breeding area. Prairie Falcon movements suggest large-scale connectivity of grassland and shrubsteppe landscapes throughout western North America. Conservation of Prairie Falcons must be an international effort that considers habitats used during both nesting and non-nesting seasons.

Key words: dispersal, *Falco mexicanus*, Idaho, migration, movements, Prairie Falcon, travel rates.