

## GUEST OPINION

By:

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More than 40 years ago, the Peregrine Falcon was in serious trouble. This raptor, the fastest animal on Earth, was headed for extinction.

Today, I am thrilled and proud to see the Peregrine Falcon depicted on the new Idaho state quarter. I know that many other iconic symbols, from Idaho's famous potatoes to the Sawtooth Mountains, could have graced our state quarter, as a few critics have suggested. I believe the falcon image is a great choice because it symbolizes Idaho values of independence, tenacity and pioneer spirit.

Let's not forget that our state motto is the antithesis of extinction: "Esto Perpetua," let it be perpetual, may it endure forever. The values that make Idaho great are the same values that enabled the recovery of the Peregrine Falcon to be the most successful captive breeding and restoration effort ever undertaken.

To honor this amazing bird, the Idaho Legislature named it the official state raptor in 2004. I find it particularly meaningful that this designation was initiated and accomplished by a hard-working group of fourth-graders. Idaho is the only state in the nation with an official raptor.

In the late 1960s, I witnessed the near extinction of the Peregrine. At the time, most experts believed extinction was inevitable. The federal government gave up trying to breed the falcon in captivity, but many passionate and committed falconers and conservationists believed this was simply unacceptable.

The Peregrine Fund was formed in 1970 by Dr. Tom Cade of Boise, who was then an ornithologist at Cornell University. Cade and Morley Nelson, a visionary raptor expert in Idaho, pioneered the Peregrine recovery effort. Nelson was instrumental in bringing The Peregrine Fund to Boise in 1984, and the World Center for Birds of Prey has occupied a hilltop at the end of South Cole Road ever since, thanks to the generous and loyal support of our members, donors and volunteers.

Nelson also worked harder than anybody to create the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area, home to one of the world's densest concentrations of raptors. This 485,000-acre parcel managed by the Bureau of Land Management was established by Congress in 1993. Idahoans should be extremely proud of this valuable legacy, which I hope will one day bear Nelson's name.

Through the years, The Peregrine Fund bred and released 4,000 birds to assist in an unprecedented recovery. We rejoiced when the falcon was taken off the Endangered Species List in 1999 and held a major international celebration in Boise.

Adaptability has been vital to the Peregrine Falcon's success. The birds have developed new strategies for survival, just as we in the Treasure Valley are learning to cope with growth while remaining among the West's most liveable cities. Peregrines can be found nesting on man-made bridges, ledges and towers. Perhaps you have enjoyed the aerial displays of the falcons that live within sight of the Statehouse or watched as unsteady fledglings practice flying from their nest atop the sugar beet plant in Nampa.

Though Peregrine Falcons are doing better than they have in decades, many other raptors are suffering catastrophic declines due to habitat loss, poisons and human persecution. Today, The Peregrine Fund is leading efforts to save the California Condor in Arizona and the Aplomado Falcon in Texas and New Mexico. We are working on more than 20 raptor recovery programs around the world.

The next time you hold a shiny new Idaho quarter, I hope you will take pride in Idaho's vital contribution to the recovery of the remarkable Peregrine Falcon. And I encourage you to support recovery efforts for other endangered birds of prey.

*J. Peter Jenny is president and CEO of The Peregrine Fund, based in Boise at the World Center for Birds of Prey. The Peregrine Fund is an international non-profit conservation organization for birds of prey.*