

(Jim Guyton)



Falconidae the FALCONS

Falcons are a renowned family of fast-flying, powerful predators. There are 65 species distributed around the globe. Falcons have inspired people of various cultures worldwide. In recent years, many sports teams have adopted the “falcon” name and symbol because it is synonymous with speed, strength, and success in the hunt. Falcons use their speed, agility, and powerful talons to capture their prey. They then dispatch their prey using their sharp beak. Falcons are truly formidable hunters and the sport of falconry, hunting with trained falcons, dates back to 2,000 B.C.

In the past, many people confused falcons with hawks, hence many of their “folk” names include the word hawk: Sparrow Hawk, Pigeon Hawk, and Duck Hawk. However, falcons are not closely related to members of the hawk family. In fact, today scientists believe they are more closely related to parrots than to the eagles, hawks, or vultures.

Seven members of the falcon family are regularly found in North America. Three species of falcons have been documented in the Carolina Piedmont. Adult males of each of these species exhibit blue or blue-gray coloring on their wings, backs, or both, and females are mostly brown. Two of these falcons have been found breeding here. The American Kestrel once commonly nested throughout our region, but today, due to impacts from man, its breeding population is in steep decline. Our other breeder, the Peregrine Falcon, had never successfully nested before in the Carolina Piedmont, but today, due to assistance from man, its breeding population in the Carolinas may be slowly expanding.