

The Canadian Peregrine Foundation: Peregrine Falcon Development - Age Guide

From¹ <http://www.peregrine-foundation.ca/info/ageguide.html>

The photos below chronicle the development of a peregrine falcon chick from hatching through to fledging. All photos are from the 2002 Rochester, New York nest, captured via the Kodak Birdcam and reproduced here with the kind permission of Kodak. Note that while these photos represent a fairly typical progression of development, the rate of growth does vary slightly among different birds.

	<p>By day 11, the beak is already beginning to acquire a slightly yellow tinge, as opposed to the pink colour it has had to this point in the chick's development.</p>
	<p>13 days. As they approach two weeks of age, the chicks are beginning to sit upright more often, but still lean on each other, or against the nest box much of the time. The very beginnings of wing feather development are also seen around this time.</p>
	<p>Day 15. Around day 15, the chicks are beginning to enter the "hunchback" phase, during which they are often seen in the pose above, with their feet splayed out in front of them and their head angled forward.</p>

¹ Permission to share on vandrefalk.dk granted by Canadian Peregrine Foundation, 23 January 2022, for educational and conservation purposes



Around day 16, dark spots can be seen along the edges of the wings, indicating the growth of the flight feathers underneath the covering of down. The down on the head also begins to take on a "rougher" texture around this time.



At 19 days of age, the chicks are roughly half the size of their parents, but their feet are already nearly full-grown, and thus appear disproportionately large. Also at this age, a small patch bare of down begins to appear behind the eyes.



Around day 20, some yellow/beige becomes visible in the patch behind the eye, and a distinct dark edge to the wings becomes visible as the flight feathers continue to grow in length beneath the layer of down.



21 days. Around the three week point, the first juvenile feathers begin to poke through the down on the breast. The chicks continue to rest on their tarsi much of the time, rather than standing on their feet, but this balance shifts quickly in the days to follow.



The two chicks are both **approximately 22 days** old in this photo. Looking at the one on the left, the amount of black protruding along the edge of the wing indicates that the flight feathers continue to develop at a rapid rate, but it isn't until the wing is spread that the state of development can be fully appreciated. This view reveals that the primaries are barely emerging from their shafts, while the secondaries are already considerably more advanced.



As these two **23-day-old** chicks demonstrate, they alternate between standing on their feet and resting on their tarsi. The egg in the background is a reference point for their size.



By day 24 the facial pattern behind the eyes is becoming increasingly evident, and some colouration is becoming visible on the upper breast as juvenile feathers develop beneath the down. The legs are now just about fully developed, and thus banding can take place from this time onward (or even a couple of days earlier).



Day 25. In their **fourth week** of life, the chicks undergo significant changes almost daily. Around day 25, the brown tips to the secondaries become clearly visible, and the number of coloured feathers visible on the breast increases noticeably. Behaviourally, they are rarely resting on their tarsi anymore at this age.



At day 26, the development continues in terms of the increasing covering of juvenile feathers on the breast. The area on the head bare of down also continues to expand



Day 27; as they approach four weeks of age, the chicks are rapidly growing their juvenile feathers both below and above, and are looking visibly darker with each passing day.



At day 28, the chicks are nearing the midpoint of their transition from down-covered chick to juvenile-plumaged fledgling, and are nearly full-grown in terms of body size and weight.



By day 29, the chicks often have their faces largely free of down, giving them a white-capped appearance. On their backs, the remaining down often appears to be clumped together in certain areas, with extensive areas instead revealing the dark juvenile feathers.



It's often **around day 30** that the chicks seem to turn into "real" peregrines almost overnight, very rapidly losing much of the down on their breast, thus revealing the heavily streaked breast feathers they will be carrying for the next year.



By day 31, the chicks often become actively interested in losing their down, preening themselves and sometimes ending up with feathers stuck to their beak as a result. From the back they are looking increasingly dark, with the wing feathers approaching full length.



By day 32, the patches of remaining down feathers are becoming restricted to the base of the legs, parts of the wings, and perhaps parts of the back, as well as the crown. They are also becoming increasingly vocal and active around the nest area, to the extent that the adults rarely visit except to drop off food for them.



Day 33 - 'the age of the white pantaloons'. This may happen **a day or two earlier or later**, but most chicks do go through this phase where they have large fluffs of down conspicuously surrounding their legs, much more prominently than anywhere else on their bodies.



34 days. Approaching five weeks of age, the chicks are within a few days of being able to take flight for the first time, and the remaining down feathers are usually largely restricted to the lower back, lower legs, and crown.



35 days. On rare occasions male peregrines may take flight as young as **35 days**, which is possible as they are fully developed at this age. Usually they wait a few more days though, until their wing muscles are stronger through exercise in the nest area, and generally by the time they do take flight they have lost the last tufts of down.



At day 36, the chicks look almost like full-fledged juveniles. They spend much of their day flapping their wings, which both strengthens their flight muscles and shakes loose some of the few remaining down feathers.



At day 37, aside from perhaps a tuft of down feathers remaining on the crown, peregrine chicks are fully developed and ready to take flight. Their next major change in appearance will be around one year of age, when they begin to moult and acquire their adult plumage as their feathers are replaced.