



Block Island's Raptors



peregrines and merlins tagged in groundbreaking study

Block Island is a haven for birds that migrate along the Atlantic Flyway, a route that follows the east coast of North America. Located 13 miles off the mainland coast and right in the middle of the Flyway path, Block Island is an ideally-positioned stopover site for birds blown off their inland course or whose routes include long flights over open ocean.

On Lewis-Dickens Farm, migrating raptors find an expanse of over 600 acres of protected grassland to hunt and rest in before the next push of their journey. Depending on the winds in a given year, dozens of peregrine falcons and merlins can be drawn to these windswept bluffs. This amazing concentration of raptors presents a rare chance to study the fastest birds in the world, and track their migration routes along the eastern seaboard.

For the past four years, Nature Conservancy scientists have been partnering with the Biodiversity Research Institute and the University of Rhode Island in a groundbreaking study of falcons at Lewis-Dickens Farm. Conservation biologists capture, band, and collect blood and feather samples from raptors to assess and document the birds' condition and determine their exposure to environmental contaminants.

Where do peregrine falcons go to breed? How do merlins get to their wintering grounds in the Caribbean? Do they return north in the spring by the same route? With funding from The Nature Conservancy, Bailey Wildlife Fund, and the Oceanview Foundation, scientists are starting to answer these questions using tracking devices such as bands, nano tags, and satellite transmitters. Last year, we tagged 97 peregrine falcons and 87 merlins, enabling us to track the birds to Colombia, Greenland, and other far-flung locations.



Block Island is a hotspot for migrating merlins.

Assessing raptors' health and tracking their movements enables The Nature Conservancy and its partners to make good conservation and management decisions for both wildlife and people. In fact, the Block Island raptor research project informs strategic land protection and stewardship efforts all along the east coast of the United States.

To learn more about this project, or to adopt a falcon, contact *Clair Stover* at [sstover@tnc.org](mailto:ssstover@tnc.org).

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