

PHILOPATRY AND COURTSHIP

Falcons exhibit *philopatry*, a term that comes from ancient Greek and means “love of the fatherland.” Young falcons often return in spring to breed in the region where they fledged. *Region* is a rather vague word, but it implies a general locality and not a broad geographic area. Nest site fidelity refers to the habit of returning to the same nest in successive years. This typically involves adult birds, but it can occur with young who return to the family nest. These behavioral traits were part of the strategy researchers used for Peregrine Falcon reintroduction efforts throughout North America, with ideal habitats, cliffs, and historic eyries being chosen for nest sites. If they survived hatching and their first year, captive-bred young tended to come back to the general area where they were released—regions that afforded a good survival rate.

For American Kestrels, Merlins, Gyrfalcons, and some Peregrines, the male tends to return to the breeding grounds first and reestablish the territory. Female Prairie and Peregrine Falcons often precede the males, but this can vary with individual pairs and environmental factors at the nest site such as elevation, latitude, and aspect (which direction a nest faces). Aplomado Falcons of both sexes explore nest sites or platforms together during courtship.



The female begs and the male preens during courtship between American Kestrels. —ROB PALMER