

Rare falcon chick survives S. American trafficking ordeal

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A photo released on January 27, 2016 by the Chilean Agricultural and Livestock Service (SAG) shows albino peregrine falcon chicks at the SAG laboratory in Santiago

A rare falcon egg stolen from its nest in Chile to be trafficked to Dubai for tens of thousands of dollars survived and hatched a chick, but three

others failed to make it.

The surviving baby albino peregrine falcon, a species native to the Patagonia region at the southern tip of South America, nearly ended up being smuggled to the other side of the world in the UAE by a confessed wildlife trafficker.

But an anonymous caller tipped off Chilean authorities that Jeffrey Lendrum, an Irishman previously convicted of trying to smuggle peregrine falcon eggs out of Britain, was on the continent and preparing to strike again.

Swooping into action, the Chileans alerted their Brazilian counterparts, who arrested Lendrum at Sao Paulo airport with an incubator containing four albino [peregrine falcon](#) eggs.

Officials estimate the eggs would fetch \$80,000 in total on the black market.

Lendrum, who was sentenced to four and a half years in prison, may have planned to incubate them until they hatched to sell the chicks to falconry enthusiasts.

Peregrine falcons are the fastest bird species in the world, capable of reaching speeds of up to 385 kilometers (240 miles) per hour as they plunge toward their prey.

They are found throughout the world, but only Patagonia has the rare albino species, which owes its distinct white plumage to a genetic mutation.

Chile launched a tricky operation to save the four unborn chicks.

"The idea was to repatriate them quickly, before they were born, to avoid the human imprint—so they wouldn't see a human as their mother, protector or food provider," said Rafael Asenjo of Chile's Agriculture and Livestock Service.

In the end, only one chick survived.

It was taken to a nursery for birds of prey in the capital Santiago, where it was placed in the nest of two peregrine falcons until it was old enough to survive in the wild.

After about three weeks, authorities returned it to Patagonia. Two rock climbers scaled a cliff face to place the chick in an existing nest perched 30 meters (100 feet) high.

"The mother came back to the nest, fed the chick and covered it with her wings, which is a sign that she has accepted it in the [nest](#)," said Asenjo.

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