

Gyr Falcon WebExtra Photo Captions by Kurt Burnham

Seeing a white Gyr Falcon is a dream that may never come true for most birders. Seeing white Gyr Falcons nesting on a glacier-carved cliff is a thrill even fewer birders will have.

A good place to see the birds, if you can manage to get there, is the Thule area in northwestern Greenland where all the Gyr Falcons pictured in this mini-gallery were photographed. Kurt Burnham, chief author of the paper summarized in News and Notes, tells *Birding* that 99% of Gyr Falcons in the Thule area are white-morph birds and are likely the whitest in the world.

Burnham's captions explain the photographs, giving us an extraordinary glimpse of the falcons' nesting behavior in a study area near the Thule Air Base, the northernmost base of the U.S. Air Force.

Burnham also provides *Birding* with a photograph of his late father and noted falcon researcher William Burnham working high on a cliff in another study area, Kangerlussuaq, in west-central Greenland.


— Paul Hess



This nest is formerly a Common Raven nest. Notice the old sticks that the ravens used to build it. All the guano and prey remains (including a Dovekie wing near the bottom of the photo) are from the Gyr Falcons, which have likely used the nest for only a few years. The chicks are around 35–40 days old. *Photograph by © William Burnham.*



An adult female feeds her four chicks at a nest site that has been used by Gyrfalcons for an estimated 690–530 years. *Photograph by © Jack Stephens.*

A photograph of two juvenile birds, likely falcons, perched on a dark, craggy rock face. The rock is covered in patches of bright orange lichen. The birds have white plumage with dark, irregular spots and streaks. One bird is standing upright, facing left, while the other is lying down, also facing left. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The overall scene is set on a high, rocky mountain peak.

These two juveniles have not yet fledged but will any day, or hour. This is a new nest, as the old nest fell off the cliff face—which is why there is not much guano, and it does not really look like a nest. The scrape, where the eggs are laid, was likely behind the chicks in the area of the ledge that is a little overhung and protected.
Photograph by © Jack Stephens.



This juvenile female is exercising her wings and learning how to fly. She has likely been out of the nest for 7–10 days. *Photograph by © Jack Stephens.*



This nest is in Kangerlussuaq, and the researcher taking samples of guano is Bill Burnham. Analysis of the deepest layers of guano provides an estimate that this site was used by Gyrfalcons as long as 960–1,160 years ago. Notice how overhung and protected the nest is, a common feature of Gyrfalcon nests in Greenland. Bill Burnham died in October 2006 at age 59. He was President and CEO of The Peregrine Fund <peregrinefund.org>, a nonprofit organization that works nationally and internationally with endangered birds of prey. Kurt Burnham also used to work for The Peregrine Fund until he started the High Arctic Institute for further study and conservation of high-arctic birds <higharctic.org>. *Photograph by © Kurt Burnham.*