

Biodiversity

New Zealand falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*)

Number 23

DESCRIPTION

The New Zealand falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) is the only remaining bird of prey endemic to New Zealand. The three recognised forms of the NZ falcon vary in size and colour, depending on geographical distribution. Falcon found in Taranaki are known as bush falcon. They are true forest dwellers and predominantly live within forest areas. The bush falcon is the smallest of the three forms, rarely exceeding 450g, with a short wingspan of around 40cm, making it more suited to flying through the forest. It is also darker in colour, with faint white barring on the breast and wings. Males are usually only about two-thirds the size of the female. Falcons can be confused with the swamp harrier. The main differences are that swamp harriers tend to glide and are larger than falcons, which actively chase their prey.

DISTRIBUTION, FEEDING AND BREEDING

Found mainly in heavy bush and steep high country, the New Zealand falcon is rarely seen north of the central North Island. It is an elusive creature and prefers habitats undisturbed by humans, though it has adapted well to significant habitat loss in the past 100 years.

Falcons are generalist predators, feeding mainly on birds but also invertebrates

and small mammals such as rabbits. Their breeding season runs from September to December. Pairs will nest in trees or on the ground under a log or bush where they fiercely guard two to four reddish/brown eggs. They have been known to dive-bomb humans and animals if they come too close.



NZ FALCON IN TARANAKI

Observations and reports of New Zealand falcon in Taranaki are uncommon but reasonably steady, which is encouraging. Some young birds move into urban areas during winter. Biodiversity programmes in Taranaki forests will help the nesting success for our falcon population.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Help control predators such as stoats, rats, feral cats and hedgehogs on your property to help protect nesting birds and young New Zealand falcon.
- Don't shoot falcon. If there is a problem contact your the Council or DOC for help.
- To learn more and to report a falcon sighting, go to www.nzfalcon.org.nz



CONSERVATION STATUS

The New Zealand falcon has been fully protected since 1970. It is considered to be an endangered species and has a threat classification of 'nationally vulnerable'. The current population is unknown but has been estimated at 3,000 to 4,000 pairs nationwide.

THREATS

- Common threats include stoats, cats, hedgehogs and rats eating eggs and the young of nesting falcon.
- Loss or degradation of their native habitat.
- Illegal shooting and poaching, as well as electrocution from power lines.

QUICK FACTS

- Can fly at speeds up to 200kmh.
- Features on the New Zealand \$20 note.
- New Zealand falcon are a protected species.



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Working with people — caring for Taranaki