

Threatened Raptors

Update on article in October 2008 *The Bird Observer*

My summary of the state of Australia's diurnal raptors (*The Bird Observer* 856, October 2008: 5-8) contains a few points that require correction or updating.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle: the proposal to list it as Vulnerable in NSW has been rejected, at least for the time being (though perhaps the penny will drop when publications on the plight of the species in other southern states appear through 2009, e.g. Boobook 27 (1) and the forthcoming special issue of *Corella* 33, devoted to the Sea-Eagle). Regarding the injured Sea-Eagle (*The Bird Observer* 856: 28), this interspecific conflict may be related to intensifying competition for increasingly scarce nest sites. And regarding the Bunnings Sea-Eagles (*The Bird Observer* 857, December 2008: 26), this tolerance of human activity is very atypical for normally shy Sea-Eagles. The same comment applies to the alleged Sea-Eagles whose nest atop an electricity pylon on the Nerang River (Gold Coast) was relocated (see Boobook 25:3): can anyone, perhaps in Brisbane, confirm their identity as Sea-Eagles rather than Ospreys?

Grey Goshawk: an editorial change altered my original meaning. It is the several island subspecies that become the Variable Goshawk *Accipiter hiogaster*, and of course, the Grey Goshawk remains as *Accipiter novaehollandiae*.

Grey Falcon: its anticipated upgrading to Endangered in NSW has not yet eventuated (and may not), so for now it remains as Vulnerable in that state.

Black Falcon: data for the national picture were omitted from the Atlas 2 book (Barrett et al 2003), although it was flagged in a Birds Australia report to Environment Australia as one of the birds of native grasslands that had declined by 30-50% in south-eastern Australia (i.e. the eastern sheep-wheat belt). Its national reporting rate declined by 38% between the two atlases, as revealed by data kindly supplied by Andrew Silcocks (Birds Australia). Andrew suggests that it may have been omitted from the book because its reporting rates were so low in both atlases across all the biogeographic regions. The following figures for the Black Falcon can be compared with Table 9 of Appendix 4 in the Atlas 2 book, against the Brown Falcon and Nankeen Kestrel (RR = reporting rate; see the caption to Table 9 in the book for further explanation of terms):

NO. OF GRIDS	ATLAS 1 RR	ATLAS 2 RR	% CHANGE	P	STRENGTH
193	0.02153	0.01338	-37.886	0.00	1

This result means that, with a significant decline of 38% in RR in just two generations (20 years for falcons in the Garnett & Crowley Action Plan 2000), it easily meets IUCN criteria, of more than 30% decline in index of abundance in three generations, for Vulnerable status. An ecologically similar bird-hunting falcon (Australian Hobby) was found not to be less likely to be detected by Atlas 2 methods.



The reporting rate for Black Falcon raises concern about its status. Photo: John Barkla, Western Treatment Plant, Melb, December 2007

EPBC Act 'Migratory' Species: if one follows links on the DEWHA Website for EPBC Act listed species, under Migratory species one finds under the Bonn Convention 'All species in the family Accipitridae for which Australia is a range state', and the same for 'All species in the family Falconidae...' At face value, this could be taken to mean all 24 Australian diurnal raptors. However, the DEWHA Protected Matters search tool identifies that only the White-bellied Sea-Eagle (among the raptors) is specifically listed as Migratory, by virtue of its being listed under the China-Australia Migratory Birds Agreement.

An enquiry to DEWHA revealed that the EPBC Act now follows the Bonn Convention definition of 'migratory' as '... any species or lower taxon..., a significant proportion of whose members cyclically and predictably cross one or more national jurisdictional boundaries'. And, by following Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme advice on whether there is reliable evidence of migration through recovery data for Australian raptors, i.e. on ABBBS analysis and the lack of data, DEWHA rejects raptors as meeting the definition of migratory. The very few raptors banded, and the remote likelihood of reporting of recoveries in New Guinea or Indonesia, guarantee this outcome.

However, HANZAB 2 identifies individuals of the southern Brown Goshawk (subspecies *fasciatus*) as migrating to Timor, the Swamp Harrier and Nankeen Kestrel as migrating to New Guinea, and the Australian Hobby as migrating to Indonesia and New Guinea. Furthermore, Carter (2005, Boobook 23:14), as well as reporting Pacific Baza on migration across Torres Strait between PNG and Australia, also reported the same for Swamp Harriers and Hobbies, and commented on the almost Northern Hemisphere scale of landbird migration across the Strait. Thus, at least four raptor species (Baza, Harrier, Kestrel and Hobby) probably meet the definition.

Stephen Debus, University of New England