

## SHORT NOTES

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### FIRST SIGHTINGS OF NANKEEN KESTREL IN HAWKES BAY

On Saturday 26 April 1975, while helping to launch a glider at Bridge Pa Aerodrome, I noticed an unusual hawk thermal up out of some pine trees in the adjacent Bridge Pa Golfcourse. It was followed by a number of finches and these were making quite a noise. Fortunately, I had my 12x fieldglasses near at hand. I strongly suspected the bird was a Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*), and a good look through the glasses soon confirmed this. It was similar in size to a male N.Z. Falcon but had considerably longer wings with pointed tips and its style of flight was more light and buoyant. Its colouring was quite striking with rich chestnut brown on the back contrasting with very pale creamy white on the undersides. Legs were a pale yellow.

This first sighting was at 12.15 p.m. and after it had thermalled up to about 300 feet (91 m) above the pines, it went into a semi-stoop and seemed to catch something small (insect?). It then landed near the top of a pine where it proceeded to eat its prey. This took five minutes. The Kestrel then proceeded to preen, standing occasionally on one leg. After fifteen minutes of this, the bird flew out and came over the top of us and landed in the top of a pine next to where we were standing. It stayed there for a few minutes and then took off again disappearing behind the clump of pines. This was seen by myself and several Aero Club members. We all remarked on the bird's relative tameness. The fairly close proximity of people did not seem to concern it unduly.

Although the bird had disappeared, I felt there was a chance of sighting it again so I made a quick trip into Hastings to get my camera gear and a friend who had a zoom lens movie camera. We arrived back at the aerodrome at 1.40 p.m. and, as we were driving up the aerodrome drive, I sighted the falcon again in almost exactly the same area. It was flying around at a height of about 150 ft (45 m) occasionally performing the characteristic kestrel hover. This consisted of stopping almost stationary with wings beating, the tail fully spread and the whole body inclined at a very steep angle to the horizontal. After five to ten seconds of this the bird would carry on with ordinary flapping flight. Mr Philip Gould managed to secure about seven seconds of Super 8 colour film which shows the hover quite clearly. At this stage the kestrel allowed itself to be blown down wind towards Hastings and, as there was a moderate westerly blowing, it soon went out of sight.

The next day was unsettled with a strong southerly blowing, and I felt the bird would be blown northwards towards Napier. This was confirmed when a kestrel was sighted by a duty air traffic controller, Mr F. Benfall, on the following Tuesday. He was showing a group of young schoolchildren over the control tower when the bird was seen flying around outside. A friend of mine, also a controller at Napier Airport, has since told me that the bird was seen many times around the airport buildings for about two weeks up until about 25 May. He said it spent quite long periods sitting on one of the light standards near the tower, occasionally making quick forays out into flocks of sparrows or finches. However, it did not seem to catch any of these birds.

At the same time as this bird was being observed at Napier Airport it was also spending some time at the adjacent Lands and Survey farm where it was watched by another friend of mine who works there. He saw it twice on Thursday 1 May, the first time at 11 a.m. whilst he was mowing a paddock. It was in sight for an hour sometimes coming very close. The second time was about 3 p.m. at the same paddock as he was finishing the mowing. It was in view again for about an hour.

This bird seems to have settled, at least temporarily, in this area since it has been sighted regularly by other employees on this farm. Fortunately, the first sighting was given good publicity by the local press and radio because it was feared that the bird might be shot by uninformed duck shooters.

The presence of this Australian Kestrel in Hawkes Bay leads to some speculation as to its arrival here. This bird was either blown here from Australia by the strong westerly winds which preceded its first sighting for a few weeks or else it is a straggler from the other areas in New Zealand in which this species has also been reported.

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#### STREAKED SHEARWATERS (*Calonectris leucomelas*) IN THE CORAL SEA

Although there is an early specimen of the Streaked Shearwater (*Calonectris leucomelas*) in the British Museum labelled "N. Australian Seas" (Serventy *et al.* 1971: Handbook of Australian Sea-birds: 119), current references place the southern extent of its wintering range in the equatorial waters north of New Guinea.

While southbound on S.S. *Chitral* from Rabaul to Brisbane I observed Streaked Shearwaters, singly or in groups of up to four, on 29-30 January 1974 between 8°13'S 153°30'E and 14°20'S 154°18'E, i.e. centrally in the Coral Sea about 800 km east of Cape Melville on the Queensland coast.