

N.Z. FALCONS TAKING POULTRY

Records of New Zealand Falcons (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) taking poultry are too numerous to mention and because of this habit the Falcon was frequently shot out of hand. The birds involved were usually the inexperienced juvenile females in their first autumn.

Two specimens which had attacked poultry were sent to me last winter; both had been previously banded by me in Marlborough. The first bird, an adult female banded 4 November 1975, was recovered in an exhausted condition after attacking a domestic duck in a water-hole. It was collected by a Raptor Association member, Greg Dunn, but died a few hours later. Examination of the bird showed no fat reserves and an 8 mm deep spike hole in the back of the skull penetrating at an angle, but missing the brain by about 1 mm. Festering indicated that the wound had been caused probably 1-2 weeks before death. The only object I could imagine which could cause such an injury without staying embedded was barbed wire. I have frequently seen trained Falcons in this study flying between barbed wire strands or through pig-netting, fortunately without injury. However, I know of a trained Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) in Britain which had the top of its skull completely torn off by flying under barbed wire.

The second specimen, banded as a juvenile female on 27 December 1975, attacked and was killed on a domestic hen on 25 April 1976. Examination of the Falcon showed a deep cut across the front of one foot. The cut was inflamed, rendering the foot swollen and useless. The only thing I could think of which could cause such a clean straight cut were telephone wires. In this area there were only 2 wires, and the poles were spaced about 100 m apart, making the wires virtually invisible against a background of broken scrubby terrain. I observed a Falcon using one of the poles as a hunting perch and also saw a Grey Duck (*Anas superciliosa*) strike the wire in full flight. The duck was on the ground for about 5 minutes but flew off as I approached. On another occasion I saw an Australasian Harrier (*Circus approximans*) strike power wires, but as it was only flying slowly it recovered before it hit the ground.

The pesticide levels in these two Falcons were not as high as in some other specimens (details to be published later), but Ratcliffe (*Bird Study* 1972: 117-147) considered that low pesticide levels in Peregrines (*Falco peregrinus*) may cause unco-ordination, resulting in mis-timed stoops.

As these are the only two Falcons taking poultry which I have examined, there is obviously no case to assume that all N.Z. Falcons taking poultry are in some way incapacitated, but it is a sobering reflection that the probable causes of these injuries were man-made hazards.

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