

SHORT NOTE

Female New Zealand falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) breeds in its 1st year

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NZ falcons (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) are reported to become sexually mature at 20 months (Fox 1977; Marchant & Higgins 1993). However, here we record an example of a wild female falcon in sub-adult plumage laying eggs at 11 months (338 days), and successfully rearing 1 chick.

Female NZ falcons have been recorded laying eggs and incubating in their 1st year before. For example, a captive-reared juvenile female released at 9 months (270 days) of age laid and incubated eggs at Wingspan Birds of Prey Trust in Rotorua in 2004. There are, however, no previous records of subadult females having successfully fledged chicks.

In Oct 2004, a colour-banded juvenile female falcon was observed to be hunting and courting with an un-banded adult male in Kaingaroa forest, a large pine plantation northeast of Lake Taupo, central North I. The female was located again on 20 Oct, and 28 Nov, when "dive-bombing" behaviour suggested that it was nesting. A nest scrape containing 2 eggs was found under a dead tree fern on the crest of a pile of earth beside a logging road. A further visit to the nest site on 4 Jan 2005 revealed a male chick c.30 days old and not yet fledged. A single un-hatched and presumably

infertile egg remained in the scrape. On 11 Jan 2005 we observed an apparently healthy fledgling being fed by the 2 adults.

Previous reports of breeding attempts have been of juvenile females mated to adult males. We know of no instances of breeding attempts by juvenile males. Individuals breed at a particularly young age when food availability and breeding conditions are especially favourable (Newton 1979). This suggests that our record of a female breeding in its 1st year, and other more recent observations of juvenile falcons successfully breeding in Kaingaroa forest, suggests that conifer plantations can provide good habitat for NZ bush falcons.

LITERATURE CITED

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