Diurnal birds of prey with long fingered or pointed wings; long tail; short hooked bill with coloured facial skin at the base of the bill (crees); powerful, largely unfeathered legs with long sharp talons for grasping prey or gripping carrion. Sexes usually alike, but females larger. Juveniles darker than adults.

**Nankeen Kestrel** Falco cenchroides

32 cm, 160 g. [34 cm, 180 g; small long-winged and long-tailed raptor with held of hovering; poised in mid-air facing into the wind with tail fanned. In flight, dark and upperwings cinnamon brown with black wingtips; underparts white with buff on breast and variable fine dark streaks. Male has blue-grey head streaked black, and tail blue-grey with black band near tip and narrow white tip. Habitat: Open country.](bp 144)

**Uncommon Australian vagrant**

**Australasian Harrier**

**New Zealand Falcon**

**Black Kite**

**Black Falcon**

**Raptors**

The raptors, or diurnal birds of prey, are found worldwide from inshore marine habitats to the mountain tops. There are about 217 species of eagle, kite, hawk and harrier (Accipitridae), of which only 1 breeds in New Zealand and 1 is a vagrant, although there are occasional rare forays from Australia. There are 61 species of falcon and kestrel (Falcoideae); again only 1 species breeds in New Zealand, but 2 are vagrants. Subfossil bones of a large, long-winged, short-tailed eagle Harpagornis moorei and of a sea eagle Ichthyophaga haematon are known from New Zealand used to have a greater variety of raptors.

New Zealand raptors are medium-to-large, mainly brown birds. Raptors have long wings and tail; long, unfeathered powerful feet with very sharp talons; a small, broad, hooked bill with a waxey cere at the base of the upper bill; and large eyes.

**Nankeen Kestrel** Falco cenchroides

**Other name:** Australian Kestrel

**Biogeographical variation:** Two subspecies: *cenchroides* in Australia and Lord Howe and Norfolk Island, and a vagrant to New Zealand, *barb* in New Guinea.

**Distribution:** Widespread and common on mainland Australia but scarce in Tasmania. They are mainly sedentary, but occasionally inland droughts force them to move northwards or towards the coast. They colonised Lord Howe Island in the 1940s and Norfolk Island in 1969. Frequent vagrants appear anywhere in New Zealand, especially in the autumn and early winter. The numerous records since 1869 include small irruptions in 1699 and 1900 when birds were seen widely in both North and South Islands. There is no firm evidence that they have bred in New Zealand, despite conditions being suitable for them judging from repeated sightings of two birds near Te Mata Peak, Hawke’s Bay, for over five years from the late 1980s.

**Feeding:** Kestrels have an unmistakable hunting method of hovering, poised in mid-air with head facing into the wind and tail depressed according to the strength of the wind. They drop by stages before plunging to the ground to seize prey in their talons. Small birds are sometimes taken on the wing. Kestrels are typically open country, sometimes riding the updrafts around hilltops or sand dunes as they search short grass for mice, small birds, lizards and large insects.


**Plate 33**