

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 (cere); powerful, largely unfeathered legs with long sharp talons for grasping prey or gripping carrion. Sexes usually alike, but females larger. Juveniles darker than adults.

BLACK KITE *Milvus migrans*

Rare Australian vagrant

♂ 50 cm, 550 g; ♀ 55 cm, 600 g. Large dark-brown raptor with paler head and shoulder patches. Soars or glides on long fingered wings held flat, and frequently twists its long forked tail. Adult has forehead and chin grey merging into brown on the crown, cheeks and throat; rest of body dark brown with some darker streaks. Pale shoulder patch when bird is at rest. Bill black, cere yellow, legs and feet yellow. Juvenile paler, and head, neck and breast heavily streaked buff; upperwing mottled buff; bill black, cere grey, legs and feet yellow. **Habitat:** Open country. [Sp 141]

AUSTRALASIAN HARRIER



NEW ZEALAND FALCON



BLACK KITE

BLACK FALCON

NANKEEN KESTREL



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

Accipitridae and Falconidae

there are occasional rumours of large eagles, presumably vagrants from Australia. There are 61 species of falcon and kestrel (Falconidae); again only 1 species breeds in New Zealand, but 2 are vagrants. Subfossil bones of a large, long-legged, short-winged eagle

Harpagornis moorei and of a sea eagle *Ichthyophaga australis* show that New Zealand used to have a greater variety of raptors.

very sharp talons; a small, broad, hooked bill with a waxy cere at the base of the upper bill; and large eyes.

New Zealand raptors are medium-to-large, mainly brown birds. Raptors have long wings and tail; long, unfeathered powerful feet with

Reading: Brown, L.H. *Birds of Prey*. London: Hamlyn. Cade, T.J. 1982. *The Falcons of the World*. London: Collins. Newton, I. 1976. *Population Ecology of Raptors*. Berkhamsted: Poyser.

141. BLACK KITE *Milvus migrans*

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Other name: Fork-tailed Kite
Size: Males 50 cm, 550 g; females 55 cm, 600 g
Distribution: Breed widely in Africa and from southern Europe across Asia and Australasia to the eastern states of Australia. In Australia, most breed in inland parts of South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland, but they have frequent irregular irruptions to other states and to coastal areas in response to droughts and local abundance of food.

Vagrant to New Zealand, with five records: Marlborough (1992–94; 2000), Mackenzie Basin (1994), South Auckland (2000–03) and Wairarapa (2002).
Feeding: In Australia, Black Kites scavenge road-killed animals, other dead animals, offal and garbage, but also catch live prey such as young rabbits, birds, reptiles, frogs and large insects. They hunt by soaring, high-quartering and low, hedge-top quartering.