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Cape Chatter

Raptors don't always get what they're after ...

The wintry weather has meant not many days out with the camera and wandering the area for interesting wildlife happenings. The main highlight has been the activity of a pair of *Black-shouldered Kite* working **The Cape**, and their interactions with the local *Galah* flock and several other bird species. The *Galahs* are quick to chase these interlopers out of their territory to prevent any attacks on them. The *Black-shouldered Kite* is one of the more common raptors in our area. Of 25 species of raptors in Australia, we have the potential to see 18 in our area. Since August 2019, we have had confirmed observations of 12 different species. The six I have no recorded observations for are: *Eastern Osprey*, *Little Eagle*, *Square-tailed Kite*, *Black Kite*, *Brown Goshawk*, and *Black Falcon*.

Given the lack of photographic opportunities this past week, I have delved into my library of photos to focus this issue on raptors at **The Cape**, sharing some of the interesting encounters I have been able to photograph since arriving in August 2019.



Left: *Black-shouldered Kite* in flight over the wetlands last week and **above**, a shot of the *Kite* in flight, taken in 2020 over the central creek line just after it was constructed. They hunt mostly rodents, but will also eat insects and small lizards. I have often seen them perched on the top of the tree stags in the creek line, but they are normally seen hovering above the estate, with wings beating back and forth and its tail spread, ready to plunge to the ground to catch its prey. They are stunning birds with white, black and grey plumage, yellow legs and feet, along with piercing eyes with a red iris and black, mascara like, eye patch.

Black-shouldered Kite (BSK) ... capturing prey

I have seen and been able to photograph two instances of the *BSK* capturing/consuming rodent prey within **The Cape**. The first was in February 2021, when I spotted this bird (below left) carrying a small rat, most likely a *Swamp Rat*, based on the size of the rodent and the tail length. The bird flew off and I was not able to see what happened to the rat, but have no doubt it was a tasty meal. A few months later that year, in August 2021, an astonishing event was witnessed on the top of one of the tree stags, when a **BSK** stood proud and made a quick meal of another rodent.



Please be careful when trying to catch nuisance rodents around your house and garden. Do your research on how best to deal with them and if you use bait, make sure it is not of the type that can cause harm to our native birds if they happen to consume a rodent that has been poisoned.

Here are some useful resources: <https://www.actforbirds.org/ratpoison/safe-home-for-birds#free-downloads>

BSK ...adults and juveniles

BSK are partial nomads in that they will move to where there is abundant prey. They may be seen singularly, in pairs or as a family unit. There was an adult pair around last week, and I have also observed juvenile pairs in the area. You can tell the difference between juvenile (below) and adult by the orange colouring on the upper breast and top of head.



BSK are not welcomed by some birds!!



BSK are usually annoyed by *Raven*, *Australian Magpie*, *Magpie Lark* and *Galah*. If you happen to see a flock or small group of any of these birds calling loudly and being very active in the air, there is a fair chance there is a raptor in the area. I have seen *Magpie* and *Raven* attack *Wedge-tailed Eagles* and *White-bellied Sea Eagles*, and are quite persistent until the raptor departs. The *BSK* are mostly quite happy to hang around and tolerate these birds, especially if they have prey to consume!

Peregrine Falcons are another matter altogether ...

The *Peregrine Falcon* is the fastest raptor in the world reaching incredible flight speeds in excess of 200 kph. They are powerful aerial hunters which swoop on flying birds (mainly parrots, pigeons, waterfowl and small seabirds) from above and behind, clubbing them with their feet or snatching them in flight. I have seen *Peregrine* attack *Starlings*, *Eastern Rosella* and *Galah* within **The Cape**. Back in July 2020, just after the tree stags were erected in the creek line, late one dark afternoon, I noticed a pair perched near the Top Dam (photos below). Rare visitors, I raced up to the spot with my camera, unprepared for what was about to happen next!



Suddenly, a lone *Galah* crossed their path, and one of the *Peregrine* took off like a missile chasing the ever panicking *Galah* finally striking it in mid-air. After a tangle, the *Galah* managed to break free and took off to buy a lottery ticket!



The pictures are not of the greatest quality because the action took place so quick and I was so captivated by the spectacle, I didn't have time to get the correct settings on the camera. I did however manage to get the action in frame and fire off a couple of shots. The original photos are very dark and grainy because of the poor light, shooting into the sky and of course the wrong settings. Fortunately, there is new software that can 'denoise and sharpen' such photos, so I have applied the software to these images so you can get the gist of the action. It's the best I could do! Birds tend to scatter when *Peregrines* are about!

Other Raptors around The Cape ...

Both *Wedge-tailed Eagles* (right) and *White-bellied Sea Eagles* (left) are irregular visitors over **The Cape**. Magnificent, large powerful birds that soar gracefully on air thermals looking for prey on the ground below with great eye sight.



There was another sighting of a *Grey Falcon* (*white morph*) in **The Cape** last week by resident Helen Temple. These birds are listed as *Endangered* in Victoria. They look very similar to the *BSK*, but are all white (no grey and black). The photos below are for reference only— I did not take them at **The Cape**.



The *Grey Falcon*, like the *BSK*, has yellow legs and the juvenile has a reddish iris like the *BSK*, but is has a distinctive yellow cere (fleshy patch between the eye and bill).

Right: The *Whistling Kite* is found around all of Australia and is an infrequent visitor gliding over **The Cape**. They are a large, slender bird and the most distinctive feature is the finger like feather tips to the wing. It is an opportunistic hunter and also scavenges. Its prey includes rabbits, waterbirds and insects. I have seen the *Galah* chase this raptor species away from their foraging area as well.



Other Raptors around The Cape (cont) ...

Collared Sparrowhawk (below) are in the same genus as the *Grey Goshawk*—Genus *Accipiter*. These are solitary birds and they have been seen around **The Cape** perched in trees among or close to the edge of the coastal reserve, where they survey the scene for prey. They usually hunt small birds by ambush or fast weaving pursuit through the bush.



The family Falconidae ... Falcons

Below: The *Australian Hobby*, is a small, dark *falcon*, not dissimilar to the *Peregrine* in looks but is smaller. Another aerial combatant, taking small birds and insects in flight.

Below Right: The *Nankeen Kestrel* is also a small and slim *falcon*. Mainly seen at **The Cape** hovering and quartering over open grassy spaces, but is also found along the coast. Eats large invertebrates and small vertebrates such as mice.

Above: *Brown Falcon*, recently featured in *Chatter*, is described as a 'rather sluggish', medium sized bird with large head. It hunts by perching and gliding, aerial pursuit, and hovering/hanging on the wind. It eats insects, reptiles, small mammals and birds.



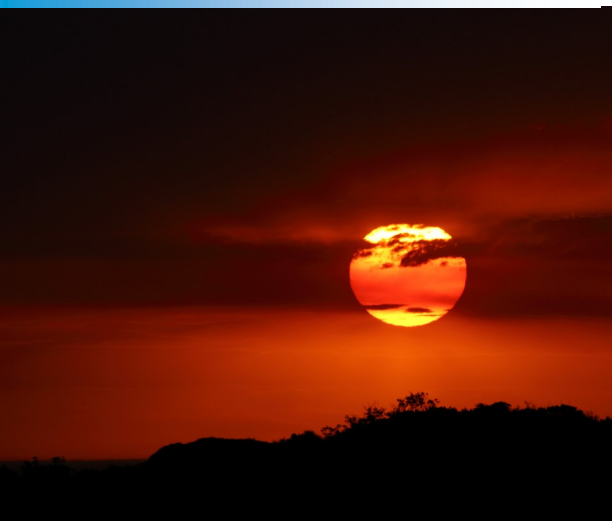
'Darcy' is looking in prime condition ...

My old mate 'Darcy' the male *Australian Magpie* has been stalking me recently. I photographed him on my back fence looking in prime condition for the coming breeding season, and that means swooping any intruders into his nesting territory he doesn't like, especially me! His plumage looks stunning at the moment with a beautiful silvery sheen!



Cape Chatter is taking a winter break (and getting away from Darcy) and will return in early August, when things should start to get active with some of our migratory birds arriving as we lead into the spring/summer breeding season. Thanks for your support and feedback so far this year, it is very much appreciated.

Nature Observations around The Cape



The Cape is on the traditional land of the Bunurong people

The ***Cape Chatter*** blog is a periodic newsletter produced by resident of **The Cape**, David Hartney. You can subscribe to receive it automatically by email by visiting <https://capechatter.com> and signing up. The website also contains all sorts of nature information and pictures of the ecology, flora and fauna at **The Cape**.

All photos shown in ***Cape Chatter*** are taken by David Hartney unless otherwise credited.

Feel free to contact David by email or through the website to report any nature observations at **The Cape**.

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