

Peregrine Falcons taking seabirds – a comment on Stuart *et al.* 2024

S.J.S. Debus

Zoology, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia. sdebus@une.edu.au

Received 6 January 2025, accepted 7 January 2025, published online 19 February 2025.

Stuart *et al.* (2024) described, and reviewed literature cases of, Australian Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus macropus* taking shearwaters *Ardenna/Puffinus* spp. and other procellariiform seabirds. Relying on HANZAB (Marchant & Higgins 1993) and references cited therein, they suggested that the behaviour is rarely reported, especially compared with coastal-dwelling overseas Peregrine Falcon subspecies. Although the digital HANZAB is freely available online via the BirdLife Australia website (publications page), it has not been updated, so the raptor volume (1993) is 30 years out of date. An explicit HANZAB update on the Australian falcons (Debus 2022: 120–125), to the same format and layout, cited post-HANZAB sources listing various procellariiform seabirds, including shearwaters, in Australian Peregrine Falcon diets; these are hunted up to nine km out to sea, or from oil rigs at sea. Additionally, there are many Silver Gulls *Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae* recorded in some of the cited recent dietary studies. Slater & Elmer (2024: 212) also recorded White-faced Storm-Petrels *Pelagodroma marina* and Little Shearwaters *Puffinus assimilis* as Peregrine Falcon prey. So, the habit is likely as common in coastal-dwelling Australian Peregrine Falcons as elsewhere in the world.

Regarding nocturnal hunting, Mooney (2013) found that Peregrine Falcons will perform their typically noisy and active nest defence at night with a partial moon, and suggested that falcons (Falconiformes) have better night vision than other diurnal raptors (Accipitriformes), owing to falcons' higher rod to cone ratio. This capacity would explain the Peregrine Falcon's ability to hunt crepuscularly or at night, especially by artificial light in or near urban situations.

As a footnote on Peregrine Falcon subspecies, alleged south-west Australian subspecies *submelanogenys* is now thought to be invalid (Debus 2022: 111; Slater & Elmer 2024: 206), although the definitive DNA work is yet to be done.

REFERENCES

- Debus, S. (2022). 'Australian Falcons: Ecology, Behaviour and Conservation'. (CSIRO Publishing: Melbourne.)
- Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. (Eds) (1993). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, Volume 2: Raptors to Lapwings'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)
- Mooney, N. (2013). Some observations of diurnal raptors catching apparently nocturnal animals in Tasmania. *Boobook* 31: 61–62.
- Slater, P. and Elmer, S. (2024). 'Australian Falcons: The Secret Lives of our Fastest Birds of Prey'. (Reed New Holland: Sydney.)
- Stuart, A., Schulz, M. and Schulz, M. (2024). Ground-based crepuscular hunting by the Peregrine Falcon: records of birds taking adult Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. *The Whistler* 18: 24–28.