

TAXON SUMMARY

Grey Falcon

1	Family	Falconidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Falco hypoleucos</i> Gould, 1841
3	Common name	Grey Falcon
4	Conservation status	Near Threatened: d

5 Reasons for listing

The population of this species is widespread, but very sparse, with 2,000 mature individuals in a single sub-population (Near Threatened: d). If any decline is detected the species will need to be reclassified as Vulnerable: C2b.

	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	4,000,000 km ²	high
trend	stable	high
Area of occupancy	10,000 km ²	low
trend	stable	low
No. of breeding birds	2,000	low
trend	stable	low
No. of sub-populations	1	high
Generation time	10 years	low

6 Intraspecific taxa

None described.

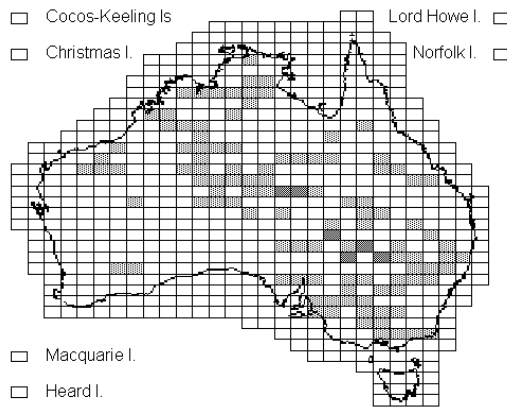
7 Past range and abundance

Arid and semi-arid Australia, including the Murray-Darling basin, Eyre basin, central Australia and Western Australia (Blakers *et al.*, 1984, Olsen and Olsen, 1986, Marchant and Higgins, 1993, Harrison, 2000). Mainly found where annual rainfall is less than 500 mm, except during inland drought, when seemingly more widespread. Some evidence of regular movements between arid zone and northern Australia, and possibly New Guinea (Olsen and Olsen, 1986), and from west to east in Queensland (G. Czechura). In the east, most breeding records from Murray-Darling and Lake Eyre basins, but species likely to breed throughout arid zone under suitable conditions (Blakers *et al.*, 1984, Marchant and Higgins, 1993). Always at low densities. Total population estimated at fewer than 5,000 individuals and 1,000 pairs (P. Olsen).

8 Present range and abundance

Species may have been eliminated early in 20th century from some former breeding areas, particularly those receiving over 500 mm annual rainfall in New South Wales (Olsen and Olsen, 1986, Olsen, 1998). Now largely absent from Western Australia south of 26°S (Johnstone and Storr, 1998). Estimated 50 pairs in South Australia (A. Stokes) and consistently few sightings across country (J. Reid). However, continues

to be seen throughout range, and evidence for general decline across arid zone (Reid and Fleming, 1992) lacking.



9 Ecology

The distribution of the Grey Falcon is centred on inland drainage systems where there is an average annual rainfall is less than 500 mm. There it frequents timbered lowland plains, particularly acacia shrublands that are crossed by tree-lined watercourses. It also hunts far out into treeless areas and frequents tussock grassland and open woodland, especially in winter (Olsen and Olsen, 1986). It preys on birds, mostly granivorous parrots and pigeons, and mammals (Marchant and Higgins, 1993). It also occasionally feeds on carrion, including dead lambs (Olsen and Olsen, 1986). It nests in the old nests of other birds, particularly those of other raptors, laying 2-3 eggs. The nests chosen are usually in the tallest trees along watercourses, particularly River Red Gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (Marchant and Higgins, 1993, T. Aumann). In any one area, nesting may be confined to years of above average rainfall, with the falcons leaving during drier times (T. Aumann).

10 Threats

All threats to the Grey Falcon are speculative and are concentrated at the wetter margins of the species' range (Olsen and Olsen, 1986). There is no evidence of a significant decline (P. Olsen). However clearance of the semi-arid zone for marginal farming has destroyed some habitat and has the potential to destroy more. Continued overgrazing of arid zone rangelands may also affect prey abundance. The provision of water in these areas may favour the more

mesic Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus macropus* over this arid-adapted species (Hollands, 1984). In the future, nest site availability, particularly in sparsely treed parts of the inland, may eventually become limiting, especially where grazing by exotic herbivores is preventing regeneration of trees (Marchant and Higgins, 1993). Over more than half the range, however, there is neither artificial water nor stock.

11 Recommended actions

- 11.1 Develop methods for assessing population trends.
- 11.2 Document regeneration status of nesting habitat.
- 11.3 Regularly monitor in selected parts of range, including both arid and semi-arid zones.

12 Bibliography

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Text adapted from

Olsen (1992).

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