

**Presence and Distribution of
New Zealand Falcon
(*Falco novaeseelandiae*)
in Taranaki**



Native Birds Taranaki

Presence and Distribution of New Zealand Falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) in Taranaki

Dave Bell

Cover picture by Dave Bell: Juvenile NZ falcon, Matau, Eastern Taranaki,
5th February 2009.

© Copyright September 2014, Native Birds Taranaki.

This report may be cited as: Bell, D.J. 2014: Presence and Distribution of New
Zealand falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) in Taranaki. Native Birds Taranaki,
New Plymouth. 15p.

Published by:
Native Birds Taranaki
9 Spencer Place
New Plymouth 4312, New Zealand
E-mail: nativebirds@xtra.co.nz

Contents

Contents	i
1. Introduction	1
2. New Zealand Falcon	1
3. Taranaki	1
4. Presence and Distribution of NZ Falcon in Taranaki	2
4.1 Some Facts and Figures	2
4.1.1 Sources of Records	2
4.1.2 Records by Month	3
4.1.3 Breeding Records	3
4.2 10 Years of Observation Records	4
4.2.1 Taranaki	4
4.2.1.1 Mokau	5
4.2.1.2 Okau	5
4.2.1.3 Rerekino	5
4.2.1.4 New Plymouth	6
4.2.1.5 Matau	6
4.2.1.6 Rotokare Scenic Reserve	6
4.2.2 Egmont National Park	7
4.2.2.1 Kokowai Track	7
4.2.2.2 Stony River	8
5. Some Sad and Some Good News	8
5.1 Some Sad News	8
5.2 Some Good News	9
6. Conclusion	9
7. Acknowledgements	9
8. References	10
Annexes:	
A. NZ Falcon Records for Taranaki	A1
B. NZ Falcon Records for Egmont NP	B1

Presence and Distribution of New Zealand Falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) in Taranaki

1. Introduction

In November 2004 a report was raised (Bell, 2004) on the distribution of New Zealand falcon in Taranaki, following the collection of 113 observation records. A copy of this report may be downloaded at <http://www.nzfalcon.org.nz/nz-falcon/distribution-of-nz-falcon.html>

Subsequent to the 2004 report an additional 540 records have now been collected and collated from a number of sources and provides a new total of 653 records of NZ falcon in Taranaki dating from March 1942 to August 2014.

This report provides details on these 653 records with a detailed summary of the last 10 years for the presence and distribution of NZ falcon in Taranaki, together with additional information of particular interest.

2. The NZ falcon

The New Zealand falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) is a fast-flying raptor that is endemic to New Zealand. Regarded as one extremely variable species, there are three forms currently recognised that vary in size, colour and habitat use. The 'Bush Falcon' is found in the forests of the North Island and the northwestern South Island, the 'Eastern Falcon' habitat is the open country of the eastern South Island whilst the 'Southern Falcon' is found in Fiordland, Stewart Island and the Auckland Islands (Heather and Robertson 1996). The NZ falcon to be found in Taranaki is the Bush Falcon.

NZ falcons have been fully protected since 1970 and the Bush falcon is classified as Nationally Vulnerable (Robertson *et al.* 2013). Currently there is very little information available about the population trends of this species (Lawrence 2002).

3. Taranaki

For the purposes of this report Taranaki is taken to be that area incorporating the Taranaki Region together with the additional traditional areas to the north (Mokau River), north-east (Waitaanga) and the east (Whangamomona and Tangarakau Gorge). See also map at Annex A.

4. Presence and Distribution of NZ falcon in Taranaki

The November 2004 report, New Zealand Falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) in Taranaki (Bell, 2004) contained details and maps for 113 known NZ falcon observation records for Taranaki up to and including September 2004.

The collection of and searching for observation records of NZ falcon for Taranaki continued after 2004. This has resulted in 540 new records being obtained, 161 of these records were for prior to September 2004, whilst the remaining 379 are for from October 2004 to and including August 2014.

The new total of 653 NZ falcon records for Taranaki now extends from the earliest from the earliest record of 25 March 1942 to the most recent for 29 August 2014.

4.1 Some Facts and Figures

As part of the recording of NZ falcon observations in Taranaki, specific facts and figures were documented in the database. The source of records, the month of observation (where available) and the breeding classification are now detailed.

4.1.1 Sources of Records

A number of additional sources of NZ falcon records for Taranaki were achieved and the specific details of all the sources for the 653 records are as listed below:

a. 2004 Report:	NZ Wildlife Service	21
	Stratford Area Office (DOC)	65
	Barry Hartley (OSNZ)	17
	Native Birds Taranaki	10

Sub-Total = 113

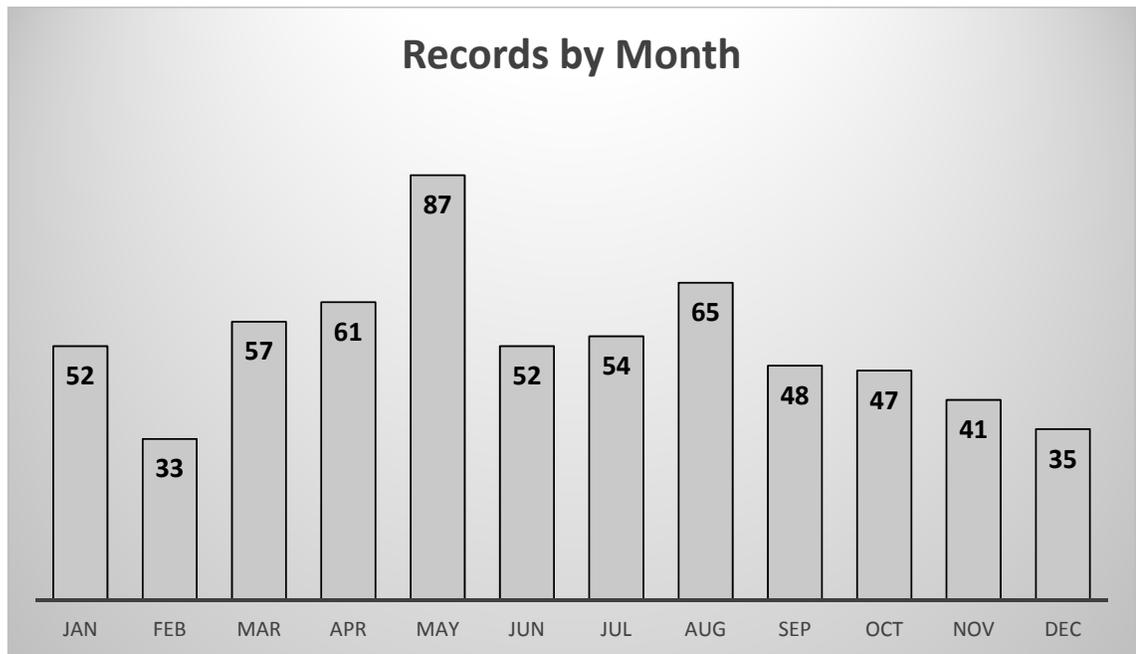
b. 2014 additions:	OSNZ Classified Summarised Notes	60
	OSNZ Atlas Schemes	68
	Barry Hartley (OSNZ Taranaki RR)	53
	Taranaki Regional Council	37
	Department of Conservation	63
	Native Birds Taranaki	259

Sub-Total = 540

Grand-Total = 653

4.1.2 Records by Month

The month for which NZ falcon observations were from often illustrate the seasonal activity pattern of the NZ falcon (and some humans). Shown below is a graph illustrating the month of observation for 632 records (total of 653 less 21 NZ Wildlife Service records for 1981 for which the month is unknown).



The high number of records from May can be attributed to the juvenile falcon being driven out of the adults' home territory at the end of the breeding season, with the juveniles often ending up in urban and coastal areas. The increase in August (early spring) would be a result of the breeding pairs becoming more conspicuous as they re-establish their bonds with calling and aerial displays.

4.1.3 Breeding Records

Of the total of 653 records only three are for 'confirmed breeding', 68 for 'suspected breeding' and the remaining 582 for 'none breeding'. Though some of the suspected breeding records that were confirmed as juveniles, indicate more breeding pairs in Taranaki than just three.

To be a confirmed breeding record there had to be either a nest observed or the observer was dive-bombed by one or more falcon. A suspected breeding record are for when two or more falcon are observed together, whilst none breeding record are for single NZ falcon observations.

4.2 10 Years of Observation Records

The average life-expectancy for a NZ falcon in the wild is currently unknown but it is believed (unconfirmed) that the longest lived captive bird survived for 16 years.

For the purposes of this report observation records for the last ten years only (September 2004 to August 2014) have been extracted and are now used as the basis of closer examination for presence and distribution.

4.2.1 Taranaki

From the total of 653 observation records, 379 were for the previous ten years. Of these, 30 records for Egmont NP and Pukeiti, as an area of special interest (see below) have been removed as have 82 repeat records that were for the same locations. This leaves 267 records that are displayed on a map in Annex A.

As would be expected the majority of the observations have come from the eastern and north-eastern hill country away from the ring plain. Additionally there have been a number of NZ falcon observed directly north of Egmont NP and in New Plymouth that are thought to have been mainly juvenile NZ falcon from the known pair breeding at North Egmont (see below).

Only the one confirmed breeding record was when a pruning contractor was dive-bombed in a small block of pines at Waitaanga by a pair of falcons on 23 Dec 13. Many of the 37 suspected breeding records are thought to have been from breeding pairs as repeat reports over the years would strongly suggest such.



Adult NZ falcon Block Nine Road Waverley
Photo by Baz Hooper

More detail on some particular points/areas of interest are provided below.

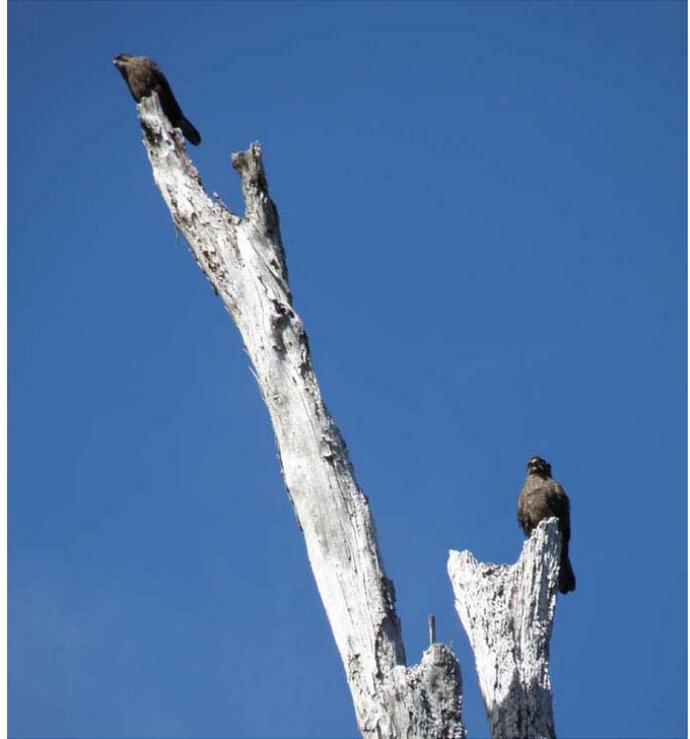
4.2.1.1 Mokau

The oldest known NZ falcon record for Taranaki is from Mokau for 25 March 1944 whilst the latest report for the area was from just up the Mokau River for 29 March 2013. Resulting in known presence in the area for 69 years.

4.2.1.2 Okau

Juvenile NZ falcons were sighted twice at Okau; two seen and photographed on 12 March 2009 and a single juvenile seen on 16 January 2011.

Additional regular sightings reported by the landowners and family would suggest there is a breeding pair in the near vicinity.



Two juvenile NZ falcons at Okau
Photo by Dave Bell

4.2.1.3 Rerekino

NZ falcons have been reported on occasion from Rerekino Station for a number of years.

On 1 April 2011 a photograph was taken of a juvenile NZ falcon perched on a disused power pole at the junction of Rerekino and Makino North Roads. This would strongly suggest that a breeding pair are in the local area.



Juvenile NZ falcon at Rerekino
Photo by John Rudd

4.2.1.4 New Plymouth

Reports of NZ falcon in New Plymouth are frequent and regular, including from both the Te Henui and Huatoki Walkways, Pukekura Park and more recently a pair of juveniles from Lake Mangamahoe but also in the city itself.

The third oldest NZ falcon record for Taranaki was from Rugby Park for 4 June 1955.

As yet there is no confirmation that a breeding pair have established in or close to New Plymouth.



Juvenile NZ falcon Cyrus Street New Plymouth
Photo by Sylvia Whautere

4.2.1.5 Matau

Following a report received in 2008 about resident breeding NZ falcons on a farm at Matau and a subsequent visit in January 2009, confirmed the presence of the pair with one juvenile, see photo on report cover. It was thought that this pair had nested in the same bush area for the previous two seasons.

The same family had been farming there for three generations and further investigation with previous family members ascertained that NZ falcon had been present for at least 60-65 years with 'many' instances of dive-bombing being recounted.

4.2.1.6 Rotokare Scenic Reserve

The second oldest NZ falcon observation record for Taranaki is from Lake Rotokare for 15 May 1955. Recent regular observations from Rotokare Scenic Reserve would tend to indicate the presence of a breeding pair close by, especially as four NZ falcon (two adults feeding two juveniles) were seen at the nearby Collier/Dickson Covenant on 10 February 2001.

This would be in line with other pest-free sanctuaries (Karori, Maungatautari and Orokonui) where NZ falcons have recently established, with a pair even breeding within the predator-proof fence at Karori.

4.2.2 Egmont National Park

In the 2004 report (Bell, 2004) there were 22 records for NZ falcons within Egmont National Park (Egmont NP), subsequently 53 additional records have been collected, making for a total of 75.

For the purposes of this report five records from Pukeiti have also been included, as this area is located between two areas of Egmont NP and form a continuous forested cover from the Pouakai to Kaitake Ranges.

Of the new total of 75 records for Egmont NP, 30 records have been for the subject ten years, these have now been extracted and are displayed on the map at Annex B.

Of particular interest and relevance are the 'suspected' breeding records from the Kokowai Track and Stony River. These are in areas where two of the three breeding records for Taranaki have previously been recorded.

4.2.2.1 Kokowai Track

The Kokowai Track on the northern side of Mt Egmont/Mt Taranaki is the site from which the second of only three confirmed breeding records for NZ falcon in Taranaki, when a tramping party was 'dive-bombed' by two falcons on 31 January 2002.

Regular additional observations from the area during 2008-09 and 2010 including a photograph of two adults from 31 December 2009 and an aerial food pass observed on 4 March 2010 would indicate the continual presence and breeding in the area.



Two NZ falcon perched above the Kokowai Track
Photo Terry Baldwin

4.2.2.2 Stony River

A previous survey of NZ falcon in Taranaki (Clarke, 2000) confirmed the presence of a breeding pair in the Stony River during the 1998/99 breeding season where they successfully raised a fledged juvenile and they appeared to do so again in 1999/00.

The more recent record from June 2006 of two NZ falcons seen in the same area would tend to indicate the continual presence and possible breeding of NZ falcon in the Stony River.

5 Some Sad and Some Good News

5.1 Some Sad News

Unfortunately it has not been all good news for NZ falcon in Taranaki as there have been three known cases of NZ falcon ending up deceased.

In October 2008 a falcon was found with an eye wound at Tahora Saddle and despite the best efforts of all involved, especially those at the Massey Wildlife Hospital this bird had to be euthanased.

On 8 September 2011 a dead adult NZ falcon was found on the concrete under a deck at a house in Bell Block, New Plymouth. It is thought this falcon had crashed whilst chasing other birds being fed on the deck. This NZ falcon was subsequently handed in to the local Department of Conservation office.



Dead NZ falcon from Bell Block
Photo by Carolyn Magon

At Waitaanga in northern Taranaki on 6 June 2014 an adult male NZ falcon was found lying on its back dead in a Magpie trap. It is likely that this bird had been caught in the trap the day before and died with the very cold temperature overnight. The NZ falcon was buried on site.

5.2 Some Good News

It is not all bad news thankfully. On 30 March 2012 a juvenile female NZ falcon was found having 'crashed beak first' into a window at house on the corner of Durham and Bedford Roads, Inglewood close to Egmont National Park. After a period of care and rehabilitation at the Wanganui/Manawatu Bird Rescue Centre at Turakina, this falcon was released back at the same property on 30 April 2012.



Release of NZ falcon back into the wild
Photo by Christine Fitz Patrick

6. Conclusion

It has been extremely rewarding to be able to ascertain the continual presence of the NZ falcon in Taranaki and to confirm a wide distribution throughout areas of suitable habitat.

Being able to validate the long-term presence of NZ falcon in a number of locations provides valuable information and bodes well for the continual survival of this awesome bird of prey in Taranaki.

7. Acknowledgements

A long-term project like this could not be undertaken nor be successful without the input and assistance from many people. Much appreciation to and grateful acknowledgement of the assistance provided by:

The many people over the years that have ensured their encounters with the NZ falcon have been recorded, without which there would be no report nor such a valuable database on the presence and distribution of the NZ falcon in Taranaki.

Special thanks also to those that have shared their photographs, especially those that have given kind permission for use of theirs in this report.

Members of the Taranaki Regional Council staff, in particular Dean Caskey and Sean Gardiner.

Staff of the Department of Conservation - Stratford and New Plymouth Area Offices (now the Taranaki Area Office), especially Bryan Williams for continual support and Kelly Eaton (now in the Hawke's Bay) for her efforts with the injured NZ falcon.

Barry Hartley of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand and other members for their records.

BTW Company, in particular Tony Standen, GIS Analyst and Jacob Hechter, Manager GIS for production of the great maps.

Steve Lawrence from the Raptor Association of New Zealand for his helpful comments on an earlier draft and to Jane Hart for editorial assistance.

8. References

Bell, D.J. 2004: New Zealand falcon in Taranaki (*Falco novaeseelandiae*). Native Birds Taranaki, New Plymouth. 15p.

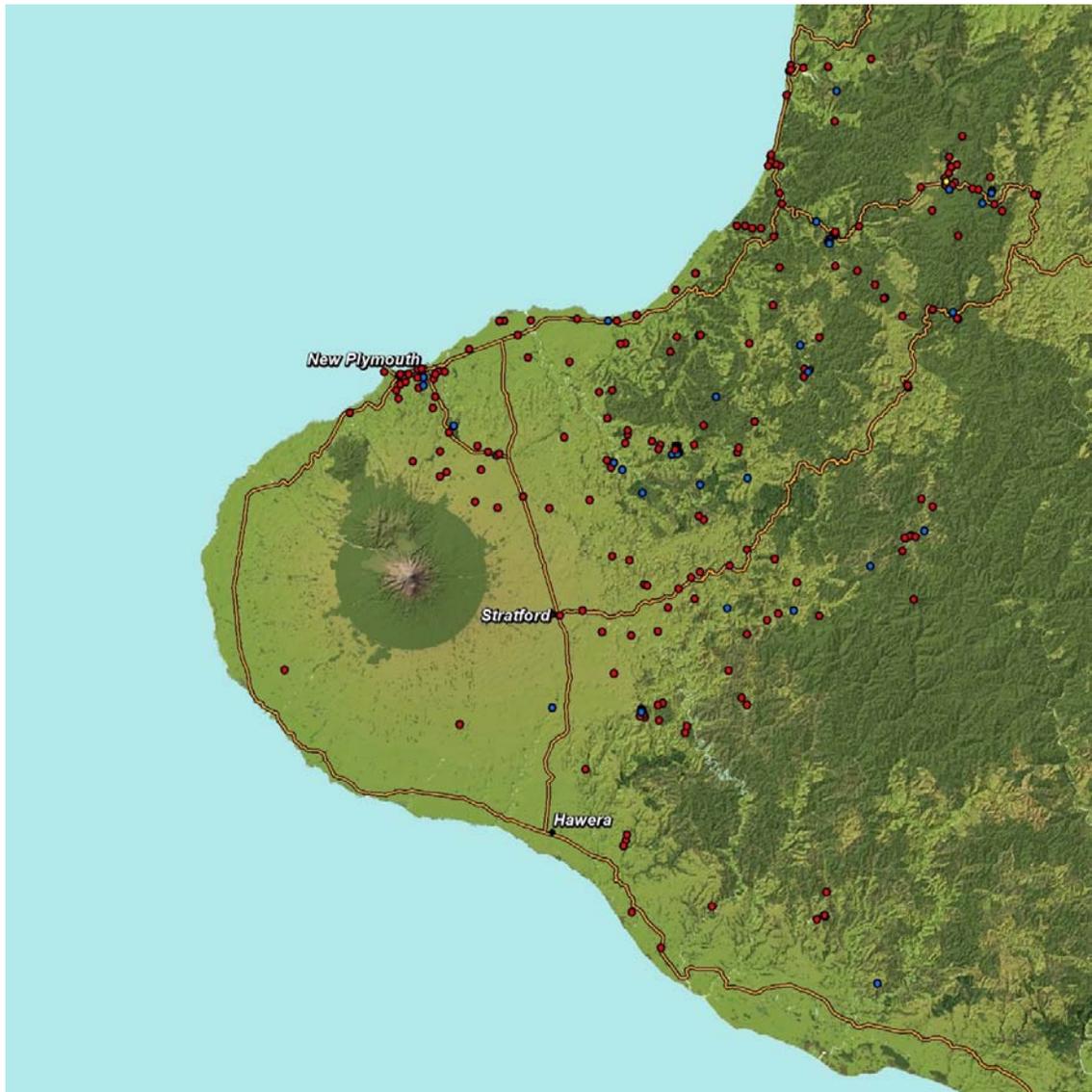
Clarke, G. 2000: Falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) survey in Taranaki. Unpublished report. Department of Conservation, Stratford. 4p.

Heather, B.D.; Robertson, H.A. 1996: The field guide to the birds of New Zealand. Viking, Auckland.

Lawrence, S. 2002: RANZ/DOC New Zealand falcon breeding survey 1994-98. *DOC Science Internal Series 84*. Department of Conservation, Wellington. 19p.

Robertson, H.A.; Dowding, J.E.; Elliott, G.P.; Hitchmough, R.A.; Miskelly, C.M.; O'Donnell, C.J.F.; Powlesland, R.G.; Sagar, P.M.; Schofield, R.P.; Taylor, G.A. 2013: Conservation status of New Zealand birds, 2012. *New Zealand Threat Classification Series 4*. Department of Conservation, Wellington. 22p.

NZ Falcon Records for Taranaki



Note: For clarity on this map 82 repeat records for the same location are not shown

Key to Symbols:

- - Confirmed Breeding Record
- - Suspected Breeding Record
- - None Breeding Record

NZ Falcon Records for Egmont National Park



Note: Not all records can be seen as they are an exact repeat location of other records

Key to Symbols:

- - Suspected Breeding Record
- - None Breeding Record