

Ornithological Observations



An electronic journal published by BirdLife South Africa and the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town



Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

Editor: Arnold van der Westhuizen

PEREGRINE FALCON ATTEMPTING TO RETRIEVE PREY FROM SEA SURFACE

Tim A Reid

Recommended citation format:

Reid TA 2012. Peregrine Falcon attempting to retrieve prey from sea surface. *Ornithological Observations*, Vol 3: 124

URL: <http://oo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=53>

Published online: 18 September 2012

- ISSN 2219-0341 -



PEREGRINE FALCON ATTEMPTING TO RETRIEVE PREY FROM SEA SURFACE

Tim A. Reid*

Percy Fitzpatrick Institute for African Ornithology,
DST/NRF Centre of Excellence, University of Cape Town

*Corresponding author: timothy.reid@uct.ac.za

Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) are known to forage at sea, taking small seabird species such as prions (*Pachyptila* sp) or diving-petrels (*Pelecanoides* sp) by catching them in flight (Marchant & Higgins 1993; Hockey *et al.* 2005). Here I report on an attempt by two Peregrine Falcons to retrieve an item of prey (a Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*) from the surface of the sea.

On 12 August 2012 while sea kayaking approximately 500 m offshore at Glencairn, near the wreck of the Glencairn S34°09' E18°26', I observed an interaction between two Peregrine Falcons, and two Kelp Gulls (*Larus dominicanus*). Initially all four birds were close together 10 m above the surface of the sea. While I was watching I noted a fifth, smaller bird, as it was dropped by one of the birds (I was unsure which had dropped it). The smaller bird, which was apparently dead, fell to the sea's surface. A gull landed on the water next to it to attempt to eat it. I moved closer in order to identify the dead bird, causing the gull to abandon it. As I moved away, one of the falcons then made at least four attempts to pick the bird carcass (which I was able to identify as a Red-eyed Dove) off the surface of the water. It failed each time, and with time, the carcass was slowly becoming water logged and sinking.

It appeared likely that one of the falcons had killed the dove, and the gulls had then successfully forced the falcon to drop the dove. Peregrine Falcons usually take their food in the air, but are known to take some prey on the ground (Marchant & Higgins 1993; Hockey *et*

al. 2005). However, it is unusual to see them attempt to take something from the sea's surface. Kelp Gulls are well known for kleptoparasitism from a range of species (Higgins & Davies 1996; Hockey *et al.* 2005), though it is not usual for them to do this to a bird of prey such as a Peregrine Falcon. They do sometime take scraps left over by raptors such as Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* (Hockey *et al.* 2005). Being opportunist feeders, they are also well adapted to taking advantage of any situations that may arise nearby, such as if the falcon was struggling with controlling its prey.

- oo0oo -

Acknowledgements

Andrew Jenkins and Arjun Amar made helpful comments about this observation.

References

- Higgins PJ, Davies SJJF (eds) 1996.** Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, vol 3. Snipe to Pigeons. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ, Ryan PG (eds) 2005.** Roberts Birds of South Africa. VIIIth edition. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.
- Marchant S, Higgins PJ (eds). 1993.** Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, vol 2. Raptors to Lapwings. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.