

Observation of Grey Kestrel *Falco ardosiaceus* raiding the nest of Dickinson's Kestrel *F. dickinsoni* in the Selous Game Reserve, Tanzania

On 31 January 2014, along the shoreline of Lake Manze in the Selous Game Reserve, Tanzania, we heard loud and incessant screeching coming from the crown of a dead Borassus palm *Borassus aethiopum* where we had been watching a pair of Dickinson's Kestrels *Falco dickinsoni* nesting for the past month, being in full view of the verandah of PSB's house. The shore around this stretch of Lake Manze is edged with palm forest,

the dominant species being *Hyphaene compressa*, *Borassus aethiopum* and *Combretum constrictum*. Moving inland from this thin strip, it starts to open up to *Acacia* and *Terminalia* woodland.

As we watched, a Grey Kestrel *Falco ardosiaceus* flew from the top of the *B. aethiopum* clutching something in its talons, closely pursued by one of the pair of *F. dickinsoni*, screeching its protests as it flew. The *ardosiaceus* alighted in the fronds of another *B. aethiopum* and proceeded to consume what we could now see was a chick. During this time the *dickinsoni* sat on a nearby frond continuing to voice its distress.

No record of *F. ardosiaceus* displaying nest-raiding behaviour could be found. In fact, Sinclair & Ryan (2003) suggest that interactions with *F. dickinsoni* may result in hybridization where the two species' ranges overlap in southern DR Congo. Jenkins (2005) describes their diet as consisting mainly of insects and lizards, but also rodents and small birds, sometimes supplemented with husks of *Hyphaene petersiana*. They further note that *ardosiaceus* may occasionally pursue birds and bats in aerial chases. We would therefore assume that our observation was simply an opportunistic event. However, on consuming its meal, the *ardosiaceus* proceeded to thoroughly search the crown of the same *B. aethiopum*, where we strongly suspected a pair of Red-necked Falcons *F. chicquera* had nested a few months previously. This suggests to us that this individual was actively searching for nests to raid.

F. ardosiaceus and *F. dickinsoni* are thought to be largely allopatric, but having a contiguous range (Ferguson-Lees & Christie, 2001). In the Selous, we encounter *dickinsoni* very regularly and they are present in large numbers. Although we have found no confirmed nests of *ardosiaceus*, there are numerous old Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* nests in the area, and these are known to be commonly utilized by breeding *F. ardosiaceus* (Tarboton, 2011). Despite the lack of confirmed breeding in the area, our observation of *F. ardosiaceus* on three other occasions at different times of year (two sightings in June 2013 and one in September 2013) would suggest that they are resident, if only in small numbers, and that the Selous is one area where the two species' ranges overlap. All these sightings have been in similar habitats – riverine palm forest or the ecotone between this and open *Acacia/Terminalia* woodland.

References

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