

Black Kite breeding – a first for the Hunter Region

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A raptor nest containing a downy nestling was located by Bruce Watts near the H. H. White bridge over the Goulburn River near Martindale (32° 25' 57.05"S, 150° 40' 25.36"E) on 13 October 2015. Two adult Black Kites *Milvus migrans* were observed roosting nearby and flying around the area. No other raptor species were observed in the area. Although it was probable that the nest belonged to the Black Kites, neither bird approached the nest during the period of observation.

A follow-up visit to the site was undertaken by Mick Roderick, Craig Anderson and Joe Stibbard on 27 October 2015. A pair of Black Kites was

observed in the area but did not approach the nest. A nestling was observed but positive identification could not be confirmed.

Having obtained details of the location from Mick Roderick, the author decided to visit the site on 29 October 2015. A telescope viewing site was established on the bridge approximately 70 m from the nest which was observed for around five hours. The following observations were recorded.

7.10 am. The head and back of the nestling was barely visible above the top of nest. One adult Black Kite was perched in a tree 100 m west of nest.

8.45 am. Two adult Black Kites flew in from the southeast and soared above the area for a minute or so then flew away. One bird was believed to be a stranger and although no aggression was seen, the second bird was thought to have been keeping an eye on the stranger while it was in the vicinity of the nest. There was no reaction from the nestling or from the other Black Kite perched nearby.

9.00 am. A single adult Black Kite returned. The bird in the nearby tree took off and both soared around the area for 10 minutes. One bird gained height and soared away while the other bird was soaring around the nest area.

9.20 am. The remaining Black Kite landed in a tree 150 m west of the nest.

10.15 am. The perched Black Kite took off and soared around locally just above tree-top height.

10.26 am. Another Black Kite arrived and performed a mock stoop on the bird already present. Both birds soared around the area in close proximity to each other.

10.35 am. One Black Kite was soaring, the other having departed again.

10.40 am. The second Black Kite returned to soar around the area.

10.43 am. One Black Kite landed in a tree away from the nest while the second bird continued soaring.

10.51 am. The nestling watched the Black Kite when it soared near the nest.

11.00 - 11.10 am. Both Black Kites were hunting low over the riverbanks. One landed in a tree away from the nest. The other caught some prey and landed in a tree. One minute later it took off and flew over the nest with the prey. The bird ate the prey while on the wing and dropped what it did not want. The prey was believed to have been a Blue-tongue Lizard but this could not be verified.

11.20 am. One Black Kite was perched in a tree and the second was absent again.

11.41 am. The second Black Kite returned and landed in the same tree as the other bird. Both birds called softly to each other.

11.45 am. The second Black Kite took off and landed on the nest, staying around 20 seconds. As it took off a second nestling was observed in the nest.

11.50 am. Both nestlings were observed eating while the parents were perched in separate trees nearby. The prey could not be identified.

12.08 pm. Both nestlings had settled down and the adult Black Kites were again soaring around the nest area.

This is believed to be the first confirmed breeding event for Black Kites in the Hunter Region.

The nest was located approximately 10 m above the ground in a River She-oak *Casuarina cunninghamiana*, one of a row of these trees that lined the south side of the river bank. The nest was roughly made from sticks and twigs and measured 60 to 65 cm in diameter. White-faced Herons *Egretta novaehollandiae* were observed nesting in another tree nearby and it is postulated that the Black Kites were using an old White-faced Heron nest in which to rear their young.

A subsequent visit was made by Dan Williams and Stewart Betts to the nest site on 15 November 2015. The nest was observed to be abandoned. An adult Black Kite and a fledgling were observed in the area.

Another interesting observation of the nest site on 29 October 2015 was the presence of Zebra Finches *Taeniopygia guttata* that had taken up residence in the lower part of the nest at the same time as the Black Kites. Two pairs were observed going in and out of the nest and were assumed to have been feeding young.