

# Brown Falcon

*Falco berigora*

#8 AUGUST 2020



Hunter Bird  
Observers Club

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Brown Falcon in its most common plumage type (photo: Steve Merrett)

## Description

A medium-sized bird of prey frequently encountered sitting on a fence post or power lines, or roosting in a dead tree, or hunting (often noisily) in more-open areas. Plumage variations are considerable – some birds are very dark, some quite pale, and some have a rufous flush. However, birds of all morphs have a paler cheek patch enclosed by two dark lines (“teardrops”), one of those running through the cheek area and one starting from behind the eye. This is a key diagnostic feature when observing a perched bird. Another diagnostic feature is the bird’s “short trousers” – red-brown to dark feathers enclosing the upper leg but leaving exposed the bird’s greyish lower leg.

In flight Brown Falcons soar and glide with slightly upswept wings, another important diagnostic feature to look for. Their prey includes insects, reptiles, small animals and birds, and also carrion.

Females are larger than males, and they do all of the incubation while the male brings all the food.

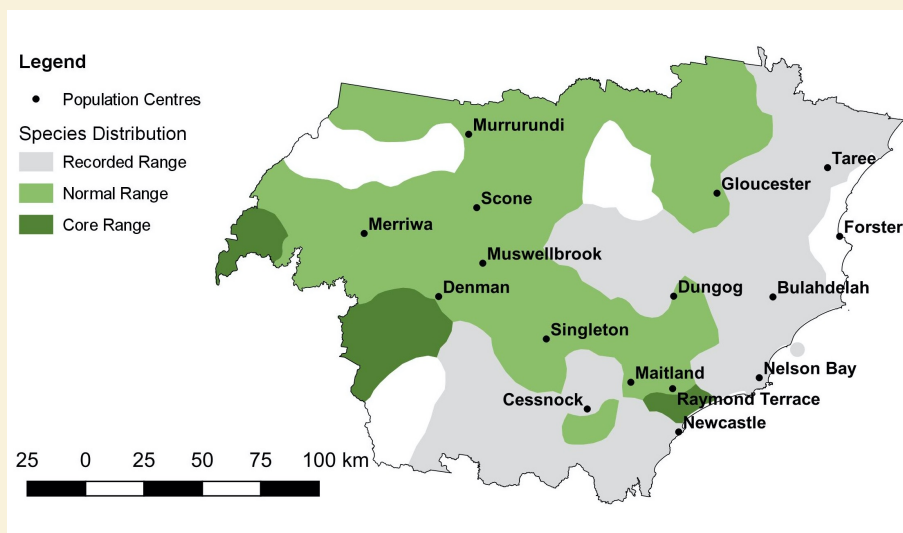
A dark morph Brown Falcon potentially could be mis-identified as a Black Falcon so always keep in mind the above-mentioned diagnostic features..



Brown Falcon in mottled plumage (photo: Rob Palazzi)

### Regional Status

The Brown Falcon is widespread in our region, and resident. The main absences are from heavily-forested areas occurring at higher altitudes. The area around Forster mostly comprises lakes, forests and high density accommodation.



Distribution map for Brown Falcon (map prepared by Dan Williams).

### Sub-species

The nominate subspecies *berigora* (Eastern Brown Falcon) is widespread across Australia, except in the far south-west of WA where the Western Brown Falcon (ssp *occidentalis*) occurs. A third subspecies, New Guinea Brown Falcon (ssp *novaeguineae*) is not found in Australia.



A pale morph Brown Falcon (photo: Alan Stuart)

### About the name

#### Brown Falcon

“Brown” is descriptive although scarcely accurate (because of the considerable plumage variability). “Falcon” is an old Norman name for all birds of prey, which now is used solely for members of the genus *Falco*.

#### *Falco berigora*

The genus *Falco* derives from the Latin words *falx/falcis* meaning sickle or pruning hook, and usually written by the Normans as *falcun* or *faucun*. Originally the term was applied to all birds of prey, but it evolved to become applied solely to a particular subset of raptors.

The name *berigora* was first bestowed in 1827; however, its origins are vague. Allegedly the name derives from an indigenous term for the Brown Falcon, but no known language contains any such term. One theory is that it combines two Sydney region words *beri* (claw) and *gora* (long). However, a significant problem with that theory is that our bird’s claws are shorter than those of related species.





A dark morph Brown Falcon (photo: Jim Thompson)

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