

THE IDENTIFICATION OF KENYA BIRDS OF PREY IN FLIGHT
PART 2, FALCONS, HOBBIES, KESTRELS AND PYGMY FALCON.

By JOHN G. WILLIAMS

The group of Birds of Prey dealt with in this paper, with the exception of the Pygmy Falcon, may be recognised in silhouette by their long, pointed wings and generally narrow, never forked, tails. (See Fig. 1.)

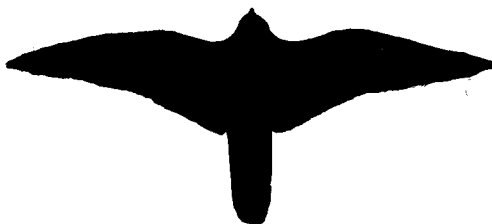


Fig. 1. Silhouette of falcon in flight.

African Peregrine Falcon.

Falco peregrinus perconfusus. COLL. and HART.

Adult. Crow-sized; throat whitish, contrasting with remainder underparts which are greyish buff with numerous transverse black markings; upperparts dark slate-grey, no chestnut or buff patch on crown.

Immature. Upperparts dark brown and no buff patch on crown; underparts buff, heavily streaked black.

The European Peregrine is an uncommon winter visitor to East Africa: it is larger and paler than the resident race. All races and plumages of the Peregrine differ from the Lanner Falcon in having dark crowns with no buff or chestnut patch.

Lanner Falcon.

Falco biarmicus biarmicus. TEMM.

Adult. Crow-sized; resembles Peregrine Falcon but underparts paler and white throat does not contrast with breast; upperparts much bluer and paler than Peregrine, with a conspicuous buff or chestnut patch on crown.

Immature. Like immature Peregrine but with buff crown patch. Two races of Lanner Falcon occur in Kenya, the South African nominate race in the south, with very few dark markings on the underparts, and the Abyssinian race in the Northern Frontier Province and Turkana, with heavily streaked underparts.

Teita Falcon.

Falco fasciuncha. REICHW.

Adult. Large pigeon-sized; field appearance not unlike a small Lanner Falcon but with a distinctly short tail and more rufous underparts; rufous-buff patch on crown and nape conspicuous. The immature plumage is unknown.

European Hobby.

Falco subbuteo subbuteo. LINN.

Adult. Dove-sized; upperparts dark slate-grey, appears bluish in some lights; underparts pale buff, heavily streaked black. The African Hobby differs in having the underparts deep chestnut and the back bluish. Both species are extremely streamlined with long very pointed wings, and are very swift in flight.

Immature. Like adult but browner, less grey, above.

African Hobby.*Falco cuvieri*. SMITH.

Adult. Dove-sized; not unlike European Hobby in build but underparts deep chestnut with black streaking not conspicuous in life and upperparts bluer.

Immature. Like adult but upperparts rather browner and more heavily streaked below, the streaking sometimes apparent in field, but not conspicuous as in the European Hobby.

Sooty Falcon.*Falco concolor*. TEMM.

Adult. Pigeon-sized; plumage dark grey, not easily distinguishable in life from the less rare Grey Kestrel, but has central tail feathers longer than others, giving a wedge-shaped termination to the tail. Like the Grey Kestrel it is often crepuscular in its habits.

Immature. Like adult but with some buff and grey markings on underparts.

Eastern Red-footed Falcon.*Falco amurensis*. RADDE.

Adult. Small dove-sized; generally gregarious, often seen with migrating flocks of Lesser Kestrels; male dark grey with conspicuous chestnut under tail-coverts and white undersides to wings; female has grey head, barred grey and black back and buff underparts streaked with black. Very kestrel-like in appearance and hovers like that species.

Immature. Closely resembles adult female.

Red-necked Falcon.*Falco chiquera ruficollis*. SWAINS.

Adult. Dove or pigeon-sized; a thickset falcon with grey and black barred upperparts; crown and nape reddish-buff; underparts barred black and white. Not unlike a Lanner or Teita Falcon when seen at some angles, but immediately distinguished from those species when its black and white barred belly is seen. Often frequents localities where *Borassus* palms are growing.

Immature. Resembles adult but is browner above.

European Kestrel.*Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus*. LINN.

Adult. Dove-sized; male has black spotted chestnut back, buff underparts with scattered spots and a black tipped, blue-grey tail. The male Lesser Kestrel has an unspotted chestnut back and is smaller. The female is dull rufous with indistinctly barred upperparts and spotted underparts; tail barred brown and black, sometimes tinged grey. The female Lesser Kestrel is smaller, not easy to distinguish in field, but is more gregarious in its habits. The White-eyed Kestrel has very bold barring on the upperparts and a grey rump and grey, black banded tail.

Immature. Closely resembles the adult female.

The resident East African Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus carlo*) is a much darker bird than the northern nominate race. Kestrels observed between June and August may be identified safely as this race.

White-eyed Kestrel.*Falco rupicoloides arthuri*. (GURNEY.)

Adult. Dove-sized; pale rufous in colour with conspicuous broad black barring on upperparts; rump blue-grey; tail blue-grey with black bands; sexes alike. The contrasting blue-grey rump and tail are the best field characters in flight to distinguish the White-eyed Kestrel from allied species.

Immature. Resembles adult.

Fox Kestrel.

Falco alopex. HEUGLIN.

Adult. Pigeon-sized; very long wings and tail; entire plumage, except flight feathers, rich chestnut-red with black streaks; sexes alike. In flight, in some lights, appears brilliant copper in colour. In Kenya found only in northern Turkana, where it frequents cliffs.

Immature. Resembles adult plumage.

Lesser Kestrel.

Falco naumanni naumanni. FLEISCH.

Adult. Small dove-sized; resembles European Kestrel, but more gregarious in habits, generally observed in flocks; male differs from European Kestrel by having unspotted chestnut back. Female closely resembles female European Kestrel but is smaller and undersides of wings and tail appear paler.

Immature. Closely resembles adult female.

Grey Kestrel.

Falco ardosiacus. BONN. and VIEIL.

Adult. Dove-sized; an entirely grey species; very like the Sooty Falcon but central tail feathers not longer than others. Often crepuscular in its habits and preys to some extent on bats, which it catches in flight.

Immature. Like adult, but rather browner in colour.

Dickinson's Kestrel.

Falco dickinson. SCLATER.

Adult. Dove-sized; plumage pale grey except for back and wings which are blackish; rump conspicuously pale when bird flies away from observer.

Immature. Like adult, but browner in colour.

Dickinson's Kestrel occurs mainly where Borassus palms are growing. It has not yet been collected in Kenya, but there are sight records of the species in the extreme south. It is quite a common bird on Pemba Island.

Pygmy Falcon.

Poliohierax semitorquatus castanonotus. (HEUGL.)

Adult. Shrike-sized; the smallest African bird of prey; occurs generally in acacia country. Field appearance more that of a shrike than a hawk; plumage grey above, white below with black and white wing and tail feathers; female has dark chestnut patch on back. Flight swift and undulating, the bird dropping when leaving perch.

Immature. Resembles adults but more buff in colour.