

# Threatened species of the Northern Territory

## Grey falcon

*Falco hypoleucos*

### Conservation status

#### Australia: Vulnerable

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

#### Northern Territory: Vulnerable

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976



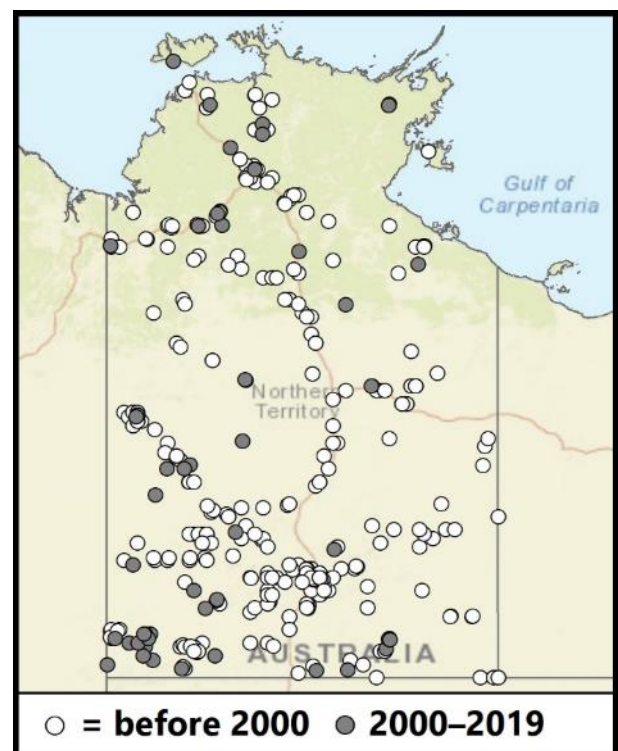
Credit: D. Portelli

### Description

The Grey Falcon is a medium-sized, compact, pale falcon. The head and upperparts are light blue-grey. The cheeks and chin are whitish, except for a faint grey 'tear mark' under each eye, and the underparts are pale grey with fine darker streaks. The wing-tips are blackish above and the flight and tail feathers are barred. The cere, eye-ring and feet are bright yellow, and the bill is grey with a dark tip.

### Distribution

The Grey Falcon is found throughout much of the arid and semi-arid zones of Australia, and has been recorded in all Australian mainland states and territories. The species has been recorded across the Northern Territory (NT), including on the Tiwi Islands and Groote Eylandt, but the majority of records have been collected from southern arid areas.



Caption: Known localities of the Grey Falcon in the NT ([nrmmaps.nt.gov.au](http://nrmmaps.nt.gov.au))

NT Conservation reserves where reported: Arltunga Historical Reserve, Eley National Park (NP), Finke Gorge NP, Judbarra/Gregory NP, Kakadu NP, Keep River NP, Kuyunba Conservation Reserve (CR), Mac Clark CR,

Nitmiluk NP, Rainbow Valley CR, Tjoritja / West MacDonnell NP, Uluru-Kata Tjuta NP, Watarrka NP and Yeperenye/Emily and Jessie Gaps Nature Park.

## Ecology and life-history

Grey Falcons live in areas of sparsely timbered lowland plains, typically on inland drainage systems, where the average annual rainfall is less than 500 mm. The species occurs in low densities and usually only one or two individuals are seen.

Grey Falcons use nests built by other bird species and prefer those in the tallest trees along watercourses. Nesting has been recorded from June to November, but in any one area may occur only in years with above-average rainfall. Clutches comprise 1–4 eggs.

The Grey Falcon is a specialist predator of birds, particularly parrots and pigeons. Individuals typically catch their prey during an aerial pursuit with a distinctive, fast, level and low-to-the-ground flight. The species is also known to capture flying insects and pounce on mammals, reptiles and birds from a high perch.

## Threatening processes

Threats to the Grey Falcon include predation by feral cats, particularly when roosting on the ground<sup>1</sup>, and exposure to increased temperatures through climate change<sup>2</sup>.

In the NT, landscape-scale changes in fire regimes and/or grazing by feral or domestic herbivores may reduce the availability of nesting trees and prey species in the long term.

## Conservation objectives and management

The primary conservation objective for the Grey Falcon in the NT is to maintain stable numbers of individuals across their range. Developing methods of assessing population trends and implementing long-term monitoring of are high priorities for the conservation of this species.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Schoenjahn, J., 2018. Adaptations of the rare endemic Grey Falcon *Falco hypoleucos* that enable its permanent residence in the arid zone of Australia (PhD Thesis). The University of Queensland.
- <sup>2</sup> Threatened Species Scientific Committee, 2020. Conservation Advice *Falco hypoleucos* Grey Falcon. Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment, Canberra.
- <sup>3</sup> Garnett, S.T., Szabo, J.K., Dutson, G., 2011. The action plan for Australian Birds 2010. CSIRO Publishing/Birds Australia, Melbourne.