

## An Observation of Fledgling Red Goshawks

In their review of the field characters and biology of the Red Goshawk *Erythrotriorchis radiatus*, Debus & Czechura (1988a,b) stressed the need for information on the juvenile plumage and aspects of the post-fledging period. On 5 August 1989 I located two fledgling Red Goshawks in a national park in the Northern Territory, on a wide, shallow creek with sandy bed and wash-out areas. There was thick, tall grass near the creek, and *Pandanus* and other unidentified trees (the usual creekside species for the Top End) along the banks. The water was fresh and clear.

In mid morning a Pacific Baza *Aviceda subcristata* was eating prey on a dead tree. There was a hawk cry, and a Red Goshawk flew in and aggressively displaced the Baza which left. The Goshawk then flew to a nest 30 m away. A second Red Goshawk was on the nest, and over the next hour they flew to and from the nest by low, short tree-to-tree flights. They always stood on the nest, did not sit, and showed no interest in anything in the nest. The nest was a neat structure, with little overhang or loose branches, in a near-horizontal fork against a main vertical branch of what was probably a *Melaleuca leucadendron* (Figure 1).

The first bird was rufous on the head, underparts and thighs, with dark 'crest' (short, projecting crown feathers), eyebrow, facial streaks and breast streaks. The throat was pale with rufous streaks. The tail was square-tipped, light grey on the underside, and lightly barred. The bill was blue-grey and the legs yellow. The second bird was similar but somewhat darker, with rich rufous head and underparts and unstreaked breast. From behind, the 'crest' was almost a black inverted triangle down the nape. The wings were brown, the legs were yellow, and the tail was square-tipped, light grey beneath and very lightly barred. The underwing pattern could not be seen on either bird.

An adult Red Goshawk was seen in flight on 8 August, about 5 km from the nest. It flushed from a perch, and flew across a valley to land in another tree. On 13 August another adult Red Goshawk was seen in a different national park in the Top End, and such good views of it in flight were obtained that there is no doubt about the three previous birds' identity. I concluded that the two birds at the nest were juveniles, because their plumage was very red (cf. Debus & Czechura 1988a).

This observation supports the conclusion of Debus & Czechura (1988a) that the juvenile Red Goshawk is rufous on the head and entire underparts; however, the legs were yellower than they suggested for juveniles. A feature not mentioned by them is the short occipital crest (lanceolate, projecting crown feathers), shown well by a photograph in Cupper & Cupper (1981), p. 198.

The fledging date and brood size are of interest. The birds' behaviour (repeatedly landing on the nest, and their short flights) would suggest that they were recently fledged, perhaps only a week or so. The estimated incubation and nestling periods in Debus & Czechura (1988b) would place the laying date of the above nest in late April or early May. This is earlier than most other Red Goshawk nest records for northern Australia, although other records of eggs in May exist (Debus & Czechura 1988b, Table 3). This is also a rare record of a successful brood of two, unknown until Baker-Gabb (1988) recorded such an occurrence. The young Goshawks' behaviour, i.e. short flights around the nest tree with much returning to the nest, is typical of that of other newly fledged hawks (e.g. Brown & Amadon 1968).



**Figure 1.** Sketch of Red Goshawk nest, in pale-trunked paperbark (?) with bright green, drooping foliage.

Drawing by W.R. from a sketch by T. Brickhill

### References

- Baker-Gabb, D. (1988), 'Australia's rarest bird of prey', *GEO* 10(4), 12-13.  
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Debus, S.J.S. & Czechura, G.V. (1988a), 'Field identification of the Red Goshawk *Erythrotriorchis radiatus*', *Aust. Bird Watcher* 12, 154-159.  
——— & —— (1988b), 'The Red Goshawk *Erythrotriorchis radiatus*: a review', *Aust. Bird Watcher* 12, 175-199.

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**Editor's Note:** the exact locality of the nest has been withheld, because of its possible use to egg collectors. It has not been (and will not be) divulged except to the local wildlife authorities and to the RAOU Red Goshawk project. This is in order to protect the birds from disturbance, because other nests in the Top End failed after their locations were revealed (in confidence) to a few park rangers, and were subsequently revealed (in breach of confidence) to other rangers and bird-watchers. This should not deter observers from reporting further breeding records to the RAOU Red Goshawk project, because reports from informants contributed a significant proportion of the nests studied in the Top End. Finally, in an article cited above (Debus & Czechura 1988a), I overlooked the fact that Mathews (1916, *The Birds of Australia*, Witherby, London) got the ventral plumages of adult male, adult female and juvenile Red Goshawk essentially correct.