

Nankeen Kestrel Takes Spotted Dove

JAMES PACHER

50 Nevin Drive, Thomastown, Victoria 3074 (Email: james@ausfab.com.au)

Summary. This note describes an adult female Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides* taking an exceptionally large prey item (adult Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*) at an industrial estate in suburban Melbourne, Victoria.

The diet of the Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides* is well known, and usually consists of invertebrates and small vertebrates up to the size of quail *Coturnix* spp. and rats *Rattus* spp. of ~100 g in weight (Marchant & Higgins 1993; Aumann 2001; Starr *et al.* 2004). The largest prey item recorded is a Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes*, which the Kestrel was just able to carry away in a strong head-wind, but the actual kill was not observed (Oliver 2004).

On 4 June 2009 I observed an adult female Nankeen Kestrel hunt and kill an adult Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* at an industrial estate in the Melbourne suburb of Thomastown, Victoria. I was standing just inside a factory door at ~1500 h, when I heard a loud thud and the Dove fell to the ground 3–4 m in front of me, just outside the door. It had crashed into the open lid of a large dumpmaster bin, situated outside the factory next to the door. Within a second of the Dove hitting the ground, the Kestrel suddenly appeared and landed on the Dove. The Kestrel lacking the power to subdue the Dove easily, a wrestle ensued for ~45 seconds, still only 4–5 m away from me. After ~1 minute feathers were scattered widely, and the Kestrel seemed to be winning. It made a few futile attempts to take off, then began hopping towards the front of the carpark, holding the Dove with one foot. The Dove was still alive at this stage, but hardly resisting. The Kestrel dragged the Dove out of the carpark, over the road and onto the nature strip opposite the factory, then ~10 m along the footpath, where it stopped and pecked at the Dove's neck. At this stage blood was visible on the Dove and it appeared to be dead. The Kestrel dragged the Dove another 2 m into a carpark, and began tearing at it (Plate 7). It removed the Dove's head, and flew up to a factory roof to consume it. The Kestrel certainly (despite many attempts) could not fly off with its catch.

At this stage I reluctantly intervened, to prevent any vehicles possibly threatening the proceedings, by picking up the headless Dove and taking it down to the end of the street away from any traffic. The Kestrel continued to wait around the carpark, where it had left the Dove, for about half an hour. It was not determined whether the Kestrel located its moved prey, but the Dove's body was gone next morning.

Kestrels are commonly seen through the warmer months, over the grassland under high-voltage powerlines at the end of the street. With the onset of the cooler months, the regular supply of grasshoppers, lizards etc. disappears, and mice seek shelter in houses/factories, so Kestrels may be short of normal prey and thus forced to take other types. In this case, the Kestrel may have flushed or pursued the Dove into collision with the dumpmaster lid, resulting in an opportunistic kill. At 110–205 g, mean ~160 g (Higgins & Davies 1996), the Dove may have been close to the weight of the Kestrel (adult females 115–255 g, mean 179 g; Marchant & Higgins 1993). However, pigeons and doves lack defensive weaponry that might deter predators.



**Adult female Nankeen Kestrel holding prey of adult Spotted Dove, Melbourne, Vic.,
June 2009**

References

- Aumann, T. (2001), 'An intraspecific and interspecific comparison of raptor diets in the south-west of the Northern Territory, Australia', *Wildlife Research* **28**, 379–393.
- Higgins, P.J. & Davies, S.J.J.F. (Eds) (1996), *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, vol. 3, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Marchant, S. & Higgins, P.J. (Eds) (1993), *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Oliver, D.L. (2004), 'Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides* takes Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes*', *Australian Field Ornithology* **21**, 47–48.
- Starr, M.J., Starr, M. & Wilson, S.C. (2004), 'Hunting rates and prey of a pair of breeding Nankeen Kestrels *Falco cenchroides* near Sydney, New South Wales', *Australian Field Ornithology* **21**, 72–75.

Received 18 June 2009

