

Encounter between Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura* and Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax*

In their review of the Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura*, Debus & Czechura (1989) stressed the need for further field study and investigation of this species. We therefore considered that the following observation warranted recording.

On 30 December 1989, along the Lerderdery River near Blackwood, Victoria, we noticed a raptor some distance away perched on a dead branch of a tree on the skyline of a steep hillside. Although it was a distant view, after studying the bird with binoculars we agreed that it appeared to be whitish around the face and rufous on the breast. Its long wings protruded beyond the tip of its tail, which seemed to have a slight indentation. These features suggested that the raptor must be a Square-tailed Kite.

This identification was confirmed when a Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* flew at the raptor a couple of times, causing it to leave its perch. In flight, the 'windows' in the wings just inside the darker primaries were very conspicuous, and the tail when folded had a distinct shallow indentation at the tip. The Kite disappeared over the ridge and we thought we had seen the last of it.

A few minutes later a Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax* flew along the ridge past the tree where the Kite had perched. It too disappeared over the ridge in the same direction as the Kite but soon reappeared, pursued by the Kite which made repeated dives at the larger raptor. The two birds had started to circle, gradually gaining altitude, when a second Wedge-tailed Eagle appeared and joined in the circling manoeuvres. On two occasions, when the Kite dived at one of the Eagles, the Eagle performed a roll-over manoeuvre and grabbed at the Kite with its talons. They appeared to touch claws but it was not possible to be sure if physical contact was made. The circling continued for several minutes with leisurely rather than aggressive swoops being made by the Kite and once or twice by one or other of the Eagles. The three birds gradually gained height and drifted off into the distance until they were lost to sight. The encounter had lasted for about a quarter of an hour.

The observation is significant for several reasons. It is yet another summer record of the Square-tailed Kite in southern Victoria, which supports the migration hypothesis; the site is also in the region of S. Garnett's breeding records for 1985 and 1986 (in Debus & Silveira 1989), and raises the possibility that the birds are still returning to breed in the area. The observation is another example of a Square-tailed Kite mobbing a Wedge-tailed Eagle (Debus & Czechura 1989), which might suggest that it was defending a nesting area, but we were unable to find a nest when later we explored the ridge where the Kite had been perching.

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References

- Debus, S.J.S. & Czechura, G.V. (1989), 'The Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura*: a review', *Aust. Bird Watcher* **13**, 81-97.
——— & Silveira, C.E. (1989), 'The Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura* in Victoria', *Aust. Bird Watcher* **13**, 118-123.

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