

Rare Falcon Thrive in Kaingaroa Forest

Perhaps one of the best and most recent success examples of a rare bird thriving in plantation forests is the New Zealand falcon (karearea). The falcon is the only remaining endemic, diurnal bird of prey in New Zealand. With approximately 3,000 birds remaining the falcon is 'nationally vulnerable' and in the medium term at high risk of extinction in the wild.



NZ Bush Falcon

Falcon in Kaingaroa Experience

Recent work by raptor specialists from Wingspan (who Timberlands work closely with) has found falcon at their highest known densities within Kaingaroa Forest. Other studies and observations around New Zealand also suggest falcon are present in relatively high numbers in other plantation forests. It appears the critical factors are the habitat and food sources on offer resulting from clear felling and the reduction of competitors and predators through pest control. When considering the nature of falcon it is not altogether surprising they thrive in plantation forests. The habitat created by cutover is almost perfect with ample hunting area, prey species (finches, etc) and because of pest control few predators and competitors.

Falcon, generally nest in small cavities or scratches on the ground and cutover areas provide considerable suitable sites. Being ground nesters (in forest plantations) and having almost no night vision falcon chicks are vulnerable to predation. However, pest control keeps predator numbers to a minimum. Many forest companies have realised that falcon in their estate could indeed be a very good thing. One example is where Kaingaroa Timberlands (administered by Timberlands) jointly sponsored a PhD student to study "the ecological requirements of the NZ bush falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) in plantation forestry".

The results were more than encouraging. Twenty nests were located in Kaingaroa in the 2003/2004 season, thirty two in the 2004/2005 season and forty in the 2005/2006 season. With a fledgling rate of over two per nest this bodes well for the future of falcon in plantations. In fact Wingspan estimates that over 200 falcon reside in Kaingaroa Forest accounting for up to 7% of NZ's falcon.



Falcon are not the only rare species that appear to be benefiting from plantation forest habitat. Long-tailed bat, long-tailed cuckoo, kerereu (wood pigeon), fernbird, whitehead and dabchick are all known to reside in Timberlands managed plantation forests. Others like the kaka and kokako are also known to visit and forage within plantation stands. By including plants, fish, invertebrates, reptiles, microbes and fungi the list grows quite considerably.

Timberlands manage rare species in accordance with the guidelines of the NZFOA Rare Species guide <http://rarespecies.nzfoa.org.nz/>