

Peregrine Falcon, 24 October 2019, Cairns

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Following a report by Norton Gill that the Peregrine Falcon is back in Cairns on the city building where it has been observed each year at about this date, I went to have a look.

First off I noticed that the usual location was occupied, but by the Australian resident subspecies *macropus*.

It was being harassed by another Peregrine Falcon! That kept whizzing in close and circling again and again. But it soon desisted and just circled around overhead for a while.



It then landed on the building at the same level as the *macropus*, but as far away as it could manage.





What subspecies is this bird? Wikipedia notes there are 19 subspecies of Peregrine Falcon that have been accepted by Handbook of Birds of the World (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peregrine_falcon).

Along with *macropus*, 11 subspecies are considered to be non-migratory (*brookei*, *cassini*, *ernesti*, *furuitii*, *madens*, *minor*, *nesiotes*, *pealei*, *peregrinator*, *radama*, *submelanogenys*) leaving seven subspecies as possible candidates for our bird.

Our bird has dark upperparts, large pale cheek patch, a broad squared-off moustachial stripe, a black cap that extends below the eye and down to the upper mandible, a clean pale breast and extensive barring on the underparts and underwings.

Anatum (North America) has minimal white cheek patch, underparts whitish, greyish, or buffy with variable amount of blackish spotting and barring including on the trousers.

Tundrius (Arctic tundra of n America) most have a conspicuous white forehead and white in the ear region.

Calidus (breeds Arctic tundra) is pale and slender with long wings, narrow pointed moustachial stripe with pale forehead.

Peregrinus (Eurasia) is similar to our bird, with broad squared-off moustachial stripe and extensive striping of underparts. It is mainly non-migratory in Europe, but migratory in Scandinavia and Asia.

Pelegrinoides (north Africa) pale, with pale forehead.

Babylonicus (Middle East) paler than pelegrinoides.

Japonensis (north Asia) is similar to our bird, with broad squared-off moustachial stripe and extensive black cap.

Based solely on appearance, I conclude our bird is either a *peregrinus* or a *japonensis*.

Dixon *et al.*, (2012) show by tracking studies that *peregrinus* migration is confined to areas west of Southeast Asia, while *japonensis* migrates further east.

The Australian Bird Guide (2017) accepts that *japonensis* is a rare visitor to Australia and is silent about *peregrinus*.

I conclude our bird is highly likely to be a *japonensis*.

References

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