

Australian Raptor Identification

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The Australian raptors (birds of prey) belong to three families. They can be some of the harder birds to identify. This document is designed to be read as a guide in conjunction with a slide show or Powerpoint presentation. It can be used as a check list with your field guide.

Most raptors are fairly easy to identify, except that juvenile, immature and sub adults birds complicate matters. Juvenile plumage is often resolved by the presence of the adult birds.

When you first see a raptor, you should look for several key features. Colour, size, silhouette, wings, tail, facial pattern, legs and jizz. Other factors include the habitat and distribution.

Colour – You will immediately register the colour. This will enable you to easily identify adult Brahminy Kite, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Eastern Osprey, Spotted Harrier, etc. A grey colour quickly cuts down the options. A white belly cuts down the options. etc.

Size – The size is an objective feature but there are species that the size can be a distinguishing feature. You should easily identify a Wedge-tailed Eagle on size. Size is an important factor in identifying Brown Goshawk and Collared Sparrowhawk, Nankeen Kestrel and Brown Falcon, Brown Falcon and Black Falcon, etc. Note that for many species, the female is significantly larger than the male.

Silhouette – The silhouette is the shape of the bird when gliding when viewed from the front. You look for whether the wings are upswept, horizontal or the tips are drooping. This is usually the first feature that you look for (you will have judged the colour and size already without thinking). Upswept wings (also known as a dihedral) are a feature of Wedge-tailed Eagle, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Black-breasted Buzzard, Square-tailed Kite, harriers, Brown Falcon, Black-shouldered Kite and Letter-winged Kite.

Wings – There are several key features to look for in the wings. Are the wings pointed, rounded and are there "fingers" pointing out of the tip of the wing? Pointed wings are falcons, kestrels, hobby, Black-shouldered Kite, etc. Eagles, kites, harriers and Black-breasted Buzzard have fingers at the tip of the wings where the primary feathers extend. Are there distinctive patterns in the wings? A Black-breasted Buzzard has prominent diagnostic white "bullseyes" under the wing. A Letter-winged Kite has a diagnostic black "M" or "W" under the wings. A Black-shouldered Kite has black inner coverts on the upperwing. The underwing coverts of Whistling Kite, Square-tailed Kite, Little Eagle and Red Goshawk usually contrast with the rest of the underwing. A Spotted Harrier has black fingers.

Tail – The tail is also a key feature to look for. Is it long or short, narrow or wide, forked, square, rounded, barred? The tail is a key feature in distinguishing a Whistling Kite from a Little Eagle where the Little Eagle has a shorter wider tail. It is also an important feature in distinguishing a Brown Goshawk and a Collared Sparrowhawk where a Brown Goshawk has a rounded tail and a Collared Sparrowhawk has a squared tail often with a notch in the middle. The forked tail is almost diagnostic for a Black Kite. A wedged tail narrows it down to Wedge-tailed Eagle and White-bellied Sea-Eagle. A Black-breasted Buzzard has a short tail. Also look for barring on the tail although can often be difficult to see in the field. Some birds have fine barring such as Little Eagle. A Nankeen Kestrel has a black sub terminal band. A Spotted Harrier glides with a dihedral in the tail.

Facial Pattern – The facial pattern is a key feature for several species. The white face is diagnostic for a Square-tailed Kite. The black hood versus a black head is a key feature for distinguishing Peregrine Falcon and Australian Hobby. The facial “tear drop” is a key feature for Brown Falcon. The facial “disc” is a key feature for a harrier.

Legs – The legs can be a useful feature. Eagles have fully feathered legs while kites (including Whistling Kite) and White-bellied Sea-Eagle don't. The leg colour is worth noting, but it is not a key diagnostic feature for Australian raptors. A Collared Sparrowhawk has a middle toe that is much longer than the toes either side, but this is very difficult to see in the field, and a Brown Goshawk also has a middle toe longer than the toes either side.

Jizz – The “jizz” of a bird is a very objective feature that takes some experience to determine. This is the way a bird looks or behaves. Does it fly fast or slow? Does it hover? Does it soar high or fly low? Does it fly alone or in groups? Brown Falcons fly low with deep wing beats while Black Falcons fly fast. Harriers fly low over grass or water when hunting. A Peregrine Falcon looks more solid than an Australian Hobby. Black Kites are often in flocks. Letter-winged Kites are often in small groups.

Some birds have other special diagnostic features. An adult Swamp Harrier has a white rump.

Habitat – The habitat is important for some species. Spotted Harriers are nearly always over grassland as they hunt for quail, button-quail, bush larks, songlarks, pipits, etc. Swamp Harriers are usually over wetlands. Whistling Kites in the south west are usually at or near wetlands. Falcons generally avoid forest and woodland. Red Goshawks are more common along watercourses, especially those lined by cadjebuts (melaleucas).

Distribution – The distribution is important for several species. Some are mostly restricted to the far north. Some are mostly restricted to coastal areas, or large areas of water. Some are more common inland.

Brown Goshawk vs Collared Sparrowhawk

Accipters (the genus) around the world are amongst the hardest raptors to identify. The differences tend to be subtle. The two in Australia that cause problems are the Brown Goshawk and the Collared Sparrowhawk. The following table lists the features to look for to distinguish them.

Both species occupy the same habitat of forest, woodland and scrub. They are often found around waterholes where they may ambush their prey usually of small birds. They are both distributed across all of Australia, although the Brown Goshawk has a northern sub species *didimus* which is smaller and has a paler throat. They generally fly with broad rounded wings, although the "fingers" can be seen when the primaries are spread. The wings are usually flat when gliding, but they can have a slight dihedral when they are gaining height. You should be able to reliably separate these from the other raptors with a little experience.

	Brown Goshawk	Collared Sparrowhawk
Size	Larger	Smaller
Tail	Rounded	Square
Eyebrow Ridge	Prominent	No
Eye Appearance	Glare	Stare
Legs	Thicker	Thinner
Middle Toe	Long	Very Long
Notched Tail	No	Yes
Call	Like Sacred Kingfisher	Trill

Size – A Brown Goshawk is generally much larger than a Collared Sparrowhawk. This is complicated by a male Brown Goshawk only being slightly larger than a female Collared Sparrowhawk. So a female Brown Goshawk and a male Collared Sparrowhawk are usually distinguished by size.

Tail – A Brown Goshawk generally has a rounded tail, while a Collared Sparrowhawk generally has a squared tail. This can be usually be seen if the bird is soaring, but it can be hard to see if the bird is flying past, and can be hard to see if the bird is perched. It can also be complicated if the tail is heavily worn or undergoing moult.

Eye Brow Ridge – A Brown Goshawk has a prominent ridge immediately above the eye.

Eye Appearance – The eye brow ridge gives the impression that a goshawk "glares" (g for goshawk), while the sparrowhawk has no ridge and it gives the impression that a sparrowhawk "stares" (s for sparrowhawk). This can usually be seen only when the bird is perched.

Legs – The legs of a goshawk are generally thicker, but the difference between a male goshawk and a female sparrowhawk is not enough to see easily in the field.

Middle Toe – The middle toe of a sparrowhawk is much longer than the toes either side. The claw of a side toe does not reach the beginning of the claw of the middle toe. But the middle toe of a goshawk is also longer than the toes either side with the claw of a side toe reaching just past the beginning of the claw of the middle toe. So this feature is difficult to determine in the field.

Notched Tail – The centre of the tip of the tail of a Collared Sparrowhawk often appears notched.

Call – The calls are very different. To me, the common call of a Brown Goshawk sounds very similar to a Sacred Kingfisher.

Swamp Harrier vs Spotted Harrier

Harriers around the world have a number of common features. They all have a very similar jizz, including having a distinct dihedral and generally flying low when hunting. Most harriers have a distinct facial disc. It does not take much experience to be able to distinguish a harrier from other raptors. Adult Swamp Harriers and Spotted Harriers are usually easy to identify. The immatures can be more difficult.

	Swamp Harrier	Spotted Harrier
Wings	Upswept	Upswept
Facial Disc	Less distinct	Distinct
Wing Tips	Barred	Black
White Rump	Yes	No
Tail	Flat	Curved
Tail Bars	Less distinct	Distinct

Facial Disc – A facial disc usually appears more obvious for a Spotted Harrier.

Wing Tips – A Spotted Harrier has distinct black fingers, although this can be less obvious in immatures.

White Rump – An adult Swamp Harrier has a distinct white rump that is usually fairly easy to see in flight. This feature is much less or even almost absent on a young Swamp Harrier.

Tail – A Spotted Harrier has a tail with a dihedral when it is hunting or gliding. You need to look for it, and it can be difficult to see at times. Both harriers have dark bands in the tail, which are further apart and more distinct for a Spotted Harrier. This feature can be difficult to see in the field.

Underwing – An immature Swamp Harrier has a strong contrast between the deep rufous body and underwing coverts and the white patch at the base of the primaries.

Habitat – Swamp Harriers are usually found close to wetlands, although they can be found over grassland in the north during the wet season. They hunt ducklings, coots, etc often by landing on them and drowning them. Spotted Harriers generally hunt low over grassland looking for quails, button-quails, Singing Bushlark, songlarks, pipits, etc.

Distribution – Swamp Harriers are uncommon in the Kimberley, especially during the dry season, and because there are few wetlands they are very uncommon in the dry inland. Spotted Harriers are uncommon in the south west, especially the Swan Coastal Plain and the far south west.

Australian Hobby vs Peregrine Falcon

These are both falcons with the typical pointed wings of a falcon. They are also typical falcons in that they hunt by flying fast.

	Australian Hobby	Peregrine Falcon
Size	Smaller	Larger
Head	Small tear drop	Black hood
Neck	Reddish brown	Bright white
Bill, Eye Ring	Grey	Yellow
Underparts	Streaked	Fine bars
Back	Darker	Slaty

Size – A Peregrine Falcon (35-50cm) is significantly larger than an Australian Hobby (30-35cm), although a male Peregrine is only slightly larger than a female hobby. A female Peregrine Falcon is considerably larger than a male, while the difference is much less for Australian Hobbys. A Peregrine Falcon also has a deeper chest.

Head – A Peregrine Falcon has a black hood, while an Australian Hobby has a dark cap and face with a “tear drop”.

Neck – A Peregrine Falcon can have a bright white side of the neck, or partial collar, although in the south west the colour is more buff. The pale buff or sometimes reddish brown collar of an Australian Hobby continues further and curves around behind the eye.

Bill – An adult Peregrine Falcon has a yellow bill and a yellow eye ring. These are grey for an Australian Hobby, but note that a young Peregrine Falcon can also have a grey bill and eye ring.

Underparts – The underparts of an adult Peregrine Falcon is finely barred, while a hobby is streaked, but again note that this is also true for a young Peregrine Falcon. Australian Hobbys are paler in the north (say north of the Murchison River and Kalgoorlie) and inland.

Back – The back of an adult Peregrine Falcon is a slaty grey and is darker than an Australian Hobby.

Jizz – A Peregrine Falcon is a fast powerful flier especially when hunting, although it takes some experience to judge this. A Peregrine Falcon usually hunts birds up to the size of small ducks. An Australian Hobby does hunt smaller birds, but it often catches dragonflies, and it can hunt until it is almost dark.

Nankeen Kestrel vs pale Brown Falcon

The Nankeen Kestrel and the Brown Falcon are both falcons. The Nankeen Kestrel is typical of a group of falcons which are smaller and usually hunt by hovering. The Brown Falcon is largely an anomaly as it flies much slower than other falcons. You should not have too many problems distinguishing these two species, but occasionally you will see a bird perched in the mid distance and be uncertain whether it is a Nankeen Kestrel or a pale Brown Falcon.

	Nankeen Kestrel	Brown Falcon
Size	Smaller	Larger
Facial Markings	Single tear drop	Double tear drop
Flight	Flat	Upswept
Flight	Hovers	Slow
Tail Band	Yes	No
Trousers	White	Dark
Upperparts	Red with black spots	Brown
Legs	Yellow	Grey

Size – A Brown Falcon (40-50cm) is considerably larger than a Nankeen Kestrel (30-35cm), but size can be difficult to determine in the distance.

Facial Markings – A Brown Falcon has a distinctive “tear drop” on the face behind the eye. Both species have a malar strips leading down from the base of the bill below the eye.

Flight – You should never have a problem distinguishing these species in flight. A Nankeen Kestrel glides on flat pointed wings and it can hover very efficiently (the best of all the Australian raptors). A Brown Falcon flies slowly with deep wing beats and the wings are not as sharply pointed. A Brown Falcon glides with upswept wings. A Nankeen Kestrel has black upper primaries in flight, and has pale almost white under wings. A Brown Falcon has evenly coloured upperwings and underwings.

Tail – A Nankeen Kestrel has a black subterminal tail band. This is usually easy to see in flight but it can be difficult to see when the bird is perched.

Legs – A Nankeen Kestrel has white “trousers” on the upper legs while a Brown Falcon has dark or reddish trousers. A Nankeen Kestrel has yellow legs, while a Brown Falcon has grey legs.

Upperparts – A Nankeen Kestrel has distinctively rufous upperparts and blacker primaries.

The Nankeen Kestrel is one of only a few Australian raptors that has sexually dimorphic plumage. A male Nankeen Kestrel has a pale grey head and tail (except for the black band) while the female is rufous.

Black Falcon vs dark Brown Falcon

A Black Falcon can be difficult to distinguish from a dark Brown Falcon, especially just from a photograph. They are distinctive and with experience you should become confident identifying them. A Black Falcon is more of a dark sooty brown to sooty black colour. It is generally an uncommon bird, and so experience is difficult to attain.

	Black Falcon	Brown Falcon
Size	Larger	Smaller
Facial Markings	Very little	Double tear drop
Flight	Flat	Upswept
Flight	Fast	Slow
Trousers	Longer	Shorter
Tail	No bars	Barred

Size – A Black Falcon (45-55cm) is larger than a Brown Falcon (40-50cm), although wingspans are comparable (95-110cm vs 90-120cm). It looks more powerful and heavier.

Facial Markings – A Brown Falcon has a distinctive “tear drop” behind the eye, but this is much less distinctive (and sometimes not apparent at all) for dark birds. A Black Falcon has no distinctive facial markings.

Flight – A Black Falcon is a powerful bird in flight. It usually hunts birds. It glides on slightly drooping wings. A Brown Falcon has a slower flight with deep wing beats and it glides with upswept wings. Flight is the most distinctive feature between these two species. A Black Falcon will sometimes soar, while Brown Falcons more often perch.

Legs – A Black Falcon has longer “trousers”, but this is difficult to determine in the field.

Distribution – In Western Australia, the Black Falcon is an uncommon bird in the Kimberley, north Pilbara and northern inland. It is rarely recorded as far south as Carnarvon and Meekatharra.

Hunting – The Black Falcon is one of the main predators of Flock Bronzewing. It strongly prefers hunting over open country such as plains or along the edges of wetlands. A Brown Falcon will take birds but it more often catches grasshoppers, small mammals and reptiles and it will feed on carrion. It has been known to take larger prey such as small rabbits, snakes and monitors.

Other birds can identify them easily, and they are very nervous in the presence of a Black Falcon.

In summary, Black Falcons and Brown Falcons are distinctive and with experience you will learn to confidently identify them. As a general rule, if you are in doubt it will probably be a Brown Falcon.

Eastern Osprey vs White-bellied Sea-Eagle

You might be surprised that I have included these two species. Some people do have trouble distinguishing an Eastern Osprey from an immature White-bellied Sea-Eagle. They are very distinctive but they can cause some doubt if they are in the distance. An adult White-bellied Sea-Eagle is very distinctive and is not considered in this comparison.

	Osprey	Immature Sea-Eagle
Size	Smaller	Much larger
Wings	Flat	Upswept
Wings	Narrower	Broader
Tail	Square	Wedge
Facial Marks	Yes	No

Wings – An Eastern Osprey gildes on flat wings (actually slightly drooping with uplifted wing tips). A White-bellied Sea-Eagle has very distinctive upswept wings. A White-bellied Sea-Eagle has broader wings, but this is fairly subjective and takes experience but which time you will probably not be having any difficulties distinguishing the two species.

Tail – An Eastern Osprey has a square tail. A White-bellied Sea-Eagle has a wedged tail.

Size – A White-bellied Sea-Eagle (70-90cm) is significantly larger than an Eastern Osprey (50-65cm), and so it is a surprise that people can get them confused.

Facial Markings – An Eastern Osprey has a mostly white face with a dark line through and behind the eye. A female has a brownish band across the lower throat, while this is less distinct for a male. An immature White-bellied Sea-Eagle has a uniformly coloured head.

Hunting – The Eastern Osprey feeds by plucking fish from near the surface. The White-bellied Sea-Eagle can catch fish, but it will attack birds and animals (especially if they are injured) and they will sometimes feed on carrion. They will catch sea snakes. I have seen a White-bellied Sea-Eagle feeding on a very freshly killed Australian Bustard on 80 Mile Beach which clearly it had killed either on the beach or possibly nearby inland and carried it to the beach.

Distribution – Both species mostly occur along the coast, but can occur inland along waterways and wetlands. The Eastern Osprey is very uncommon in Victoria and Tasmania.

Wedge-tailed Eagle vs White-bellied Sea-Eagle

You should not have a problem distinguishing these two species if you get a good look at the bird, but an immature White-bellied Sea-Eagle can superficially look like a Wedge-tailed Eagle from a distance in flight when it can appear that a White-bellied Sea-Eagle has a wedged tail.

	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Immature Sea-Eagle
Size	Larger	Smaller
Upswept Wings	Tips higher	Curved
Wedge Tail	More pointed	Yes
Wing Patches	No	Yes
Head		Paler than body
Tail	Dark	White or mottled
Trousers	Full	Half

Size – A Wedge-tailed Eagle (90-110cm) is larger than a White-bellied Sea-Eagle (70-90cm). This is often enough to identify the bird.

Wings – Both species have upswept wings. A White-bellied Sea-Eagle has wings in a continuous curve with short “fingers” that sometimes are not apparent. A Wedge-tailed Eagle has upswept wings that are straighter rather than curved and not held as high, and with longer fingers the tips usually seem to point up. An immature White-bellied Sea-Eagle has distinct pale patches in the under wing at the base of the primaries. Immature Wedge-tailed Eagles can have paler areas under the wing, but mostly the underwing coverts.

Tail – Both species have a wedged tail, but it is more distinctive and pointed for a Wedge-tailed Eagle. The tail is uniformly coloured for a Wedge-tailed Eagle while it is white for an immature White-bellied Sea-Eagle and white with a wide sub terminal dark band for a juvenile.

Legs – A Wedge-tailed Eagle has fully feathered legs (trousers) like all true eagles, while only the upper part of the legs of a White-bellied Sea-Eagle are feathered.

Habitat – The White-bellied Sea-Eagle is most common along the coast, but it does occur along rivers and near large wetlands. The Wedge-tailed Eagle is more common inland. So they don't overlap in many places.

Note that the decision is whether an immature White-bellied Sea-Eagle might be an immature Wedge-tailed Eagle. I have never thought an immature Wedge-tailed Eagle might be a White-bellied Sea-Eagle.

Whistling Kite vs Black Kite

Whistling Kites are also common in areas that Black Kites occur. They look superficially similar. They are the same size and they have the same wingspan. They have a very similar silhouette.

	Whistling Kite	Black Kite
Tail	Long, rounded	Wider, forked
Underwing	Patterned	Little pattern
Legs	Greyish	Yellowish
Facial Pattern	Plain	Some pattern

Tail – A Whistling Kite has a long, uniformly coloured and narrow tail rounded at the corners. A Black Kite has a slightly shorter, wider tail which is usually forked unless it is heavily worn or spread. The tail is darker than a Whistling Kite. A Black Kite often twists its tail in flight to maintain its position when gliding.

Underwing – The underwing of a Whistling Kite shows pale secondaries and underwing coverts. A Black Kite can have pale patches under the wing, but they are not as distinct as an adult Whistling Kite.

Colour – A Black Kite is generally darker than a Whistling Kite, but this takes some experience to be a reliable feature.

Distribution – In Western Australia, Black Kites are rare south of Carnarvon and Meekatharra.

Habitat – In the south west, Whistling Kites are usually found at or near wetlands. But further north they are one of the most common raptors in open country.

Flocks – Black Kites often congregate in large numbers, especially near grass fires and rubbish tips. Whistling Kites can group together but not as often and not in the same numbers.

Hunting – Whistling Kites and Black Kites generally eat similar prey, but a Whistling Kite is also capable of catching fish. They both sometimes feed on carrion.

Whistling Kite vs Little Eagle

An adult Little Eagle is reasonably easy to identify. An immature Little Eagle looks similar to a Whistling Kite. You will make mistakes, but with experience you will make fewer mistakes.

	Whistling Kite	Little Eagle
Tail	Long, rounded	Shorter, wider
Tail	Not barred	Finely barred
Wings	M shaped	Tips slightly raised
Underwing Coverts	Pale	Reddish
Trousers	No	Yes

Tail – A Whistling Kite has a long, uniformly coloured and narrow tail rounded at the corners. A Little Eagle has a shorter, wider tail that is finely barred although the barring is difficult to see in the field.

Wings – A Whistling Kite when it glides has wings that are slightly raised near the body, drooping slightly in the middle with wing tips usually slightly uplifted, sometimes called “M” or “W” shaped. A Little Eagle glides on flat wings. A Whistling Kite has pale or white secondaries, although this is less distinct in immature birds. The underwing coverts of a Whistling Kite are a pale sandy colour, and they are rufous or reddish for a Little Eagle.

Legs – A Little Eagle has fully feathered legs even though it is not a true “*Aquila*” eagle. The legs are only partly feathered for a Whistling Kite. This feature is usually fairly easy to see when the bird is perched.

Black-shouldered Kite vs Letter-winged Kite

Black-shouldered Kites and Letter-winged Kites are very similar. They belong to the same genus *Elanus*. They have the same silhouette, and very similar flight patterns. They look extremely similar when they are perched.

	Black-shouldered Kite	Letter-winged Kite
Wing Pattern	Small black patch	Long black patch
Eye Patch	Front and behind	Front only
Cere	Yellow	Dark grey, brown
Crepuscular	No	Yes
Distribution	Widespread	Mostly northern inland
Groups	Singles or pairs	Often in small groups

Wing Pattern – This is the diagnostic feature. A Black-shouldered Kite has a short black patch on the inner upperwing coverts, and the primary coverts of the underwing. A Letter-winged Kite has a similar short black patch on the upperwing coverts, and a black band on the underwing.

Eye Patch – This is the main feature to look for when the bird is perched. A Black-shouldered Kite has a black patch in front of the eye and it extends just above the eye and behind the eye. A Letter-winged Kite only has the patch in front of the eye.

Cere – This is the base of the upper bill. A Black-shouldered Kite has a yellow cere, while a Letter-winged Kite has a grey or grey brown cere. This is quite a small and you may need a scope to see it reliably.

Crown – The crown of a Letter-winged Kite is greyer than a Black-shouldered Kite but the difference is not great and you have to be careful of light conditions.

Legs – The legs of a Black-shouldered Kite are yellower than a Letter-winged Kite.

Crepuscular – A Letter-winged Kite is largely crepuscular. That is, it feeds mainly in the late afternoon & early evening and similarly near dawn. So if you see a bird flying during the day, it is almost certainly a Black-shouldered Kite unless it has just been flushed.

Distribution – Letter-winged Kites are usually confined to the interior. In very good times their numbers increase and they can spread out sometimes reaching the coast. Similarly in extreme harsh times they can spread to the coast.

Groups – Letter-winged Kites often congregate in small numbers, especially when breeding. It is unusual to see a group of Black-shouldered Kites.

Square-tailed Kite vs pale morph Little Eagle

A Square-tailed Kite and a pale morph Little Eagle are really quite different, but they look somewhat similar if you are inexperienced.

	Square-tailed Kite	Little Eagle
Tail	Square; dark terminal band	Barred; broader
Face	White; smaller bill	Sandy; heavier bill
Wings	Slightly upswept	Flat or slightly drooping
Wing Tips	Barred	Black
Trousers	No	Yes
Underwing	Patterned	Pale M pattern

Tail – A Square-tailed Kite has a thin dark terminal band on the tail, and the tail usually looks square no matter how spread it is. The tail of a Little Eagle is barred, and is usually broader and slightly curved except when it is almost fully closed.

Face – The white face of a Square-tailed Kite is almost diagnostic. A pale morph Little Eagle has a sandy coloured head, and the bill is much heavier.

Wings – A Square-tailed Kite flies with slightly upswept wings. This is diagnostic. Nothing similar has upswept wings. A Little Eagle glides on flat wings, sometimes slightly drooped. A Little Eagle has dark almost black primary tips. A Square-tailed Kite has paler fingers usually with noticeable bars, although a juvenile does have darker wing tips.

Trousers – A Little Eagle has fully feathered legs even though it is not a true “*Aquila*” eagle. The legs are only partly feathered for a Square-tailed Kite.

Underwing – A pale morph Little Eagle has a distinctive pale “M” pattern on the underwing. They both have rufous lesser underwing coverts, but this is more extensive for a Square-tailed Kite.

Distribution – Square-tailed Kites migrate from the south west, and are very uncommon in the south west from June to August. The south west in spring / summer is the region and time of year where they are most common. Possibly due to climate change, some Square-tailed Kites seem to over winter now in the south west.

Habitat – Square-tailed Kites hunt birds in forest and open woodland. They often fly very low over the tree tops. They can also hunt low over heathland.

Immature Brahminy Kite vs Little Eagle

An adult Brahminy Kite is unmistakable. A juvenile or immature Brahminy Kite can fool you as you don't see them very often. When perched an immature Brahminy Kite looks very similar to a juvenile Black Kite or juvenile Whistling Kite. They are easier to identify in flight when it looks more like a pale Little Eagle.

	Brahminy Kite	Little Eagle
Tail	Rounded	Rounded tips
Tail	Uniform	Lightly barred
Tail	Pale tipped	Pale tipped
Secondaries	Brown	Grey

Tail – The length of the tail of a Brahminy Kite is between the length of a Little Eagle and a Whistling Kite. It is rounded with a pale tip. An immature Brahminy Kite has a uniform brown tail with a fine white tip, which helps to distinguish it from a Whistling Kite. The tail of a Little Eagle is rounded at the corners and square at the end, and it is lightly barred and also has a pale tip.

Secondaries – The secondaries and tertials of the underwing of an immature Brahminy Kite are brown, while they are grey on a Little Eagle.

Black-breasted Buzzard

This is not a true buzzard, and some people for this reason call it a Black-breasted Kite. It is very distinctive in flight and is one of the easier Australian raptors to identify, even as an immature.

	Black-breasted Buzzard
Tail	Short, square
Underwing	Bullseyes
Wings	Upswept

Wings – This is the diagnostic feature when the bird is in flight. A Black-breasted Buzzard has very distinct white patches under the wing, often called bullseyes. They fly with a strong dihedral that with experience is unlike any other Australian raptor.

Tail – The tail is quite short and square, and again is quite distinctive compared to other Australian raptors.

Red Goshawk

Red Goshawk is one of Australia's least common raptors. It is about the size of a Square-tailed Kite or a Little Eagle. It is a different genus and larger than the *Accipiters* which include the other goshawks, and is distinctive from the other Australian raptors.

	Red Goshawk
Head	Streaked
Trousers	Red
Underwing	Barred; red coverts
Tail	Barred

Head – The head is finely streaked.

Trousers – The trousers are red.

Underwing – The underwing coverts are red and the rest is barred.

Tail – The tail is also barred.

Upperparts – The feathers of the upperparts are fringed red.

The female has a red breast with a few fine black streaks. The male is much smaller and has a reddish wash with fine black streaks.

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