

ONE-EYED RAPTORS

D. Whitelaw

Biggs (Safring News, Vol. 3, 1974) described a Martial Eagle Polemaetus bellicosus apparently able to hunt successfully with only one eye, and posed the question as to whether a nestling with one eye could develop normal hunting habits. The following observation throws some light on this query:

A Black-shouldered kite Elanus caeruleus was trapped on 27 July 1978 near Langebaan Lagoon, south-western Cape. On being taken off the balchatri trap the left eye socket was found to contain only a small residue of scar tissue, indicating an injury of some duration. The bird's behaviour was similar to that of numerous other Black-shouldered Kites trapped in this area, and there was nothing to suggest that it was handicapped. Similarly its mass (288 g compared to 275 g, the mean for five other first year birds trapped near Langebaan that season) confirmed its hunting ability.

The bird's plumage showed that it had fledged the previous summer, while the injury was of some months duration. It is reasonable to surmise therefore that the bird was still developing hunting techniques when the injury occurred, and that the injury did not disrupt the process.

Earlier in that season a Rock Kestrel Falco tinnunculus, which showed injuries to both feet, was trapped about 20 km north of Cape Town. The outer and middle toes of the right foot and the outer claw of the left foot had been crushed and were without power. The injury was fairly recent, but the bird appeared to hunt normally and again its mass was comparable to that of other Rock Kestrels in this area. (208 g compared to 220 g, the mean of eight other birds trapped in this area.) It is interesting to speculate as to how a bird could have received crush injuries.

DR. D. WHITELOW, 24 Twickenham Road, Mowbray, 7700 CAPE TOWN.

