

Falco femoralis (Aplomado Falcon)

Family: Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

Order: Falconiformes (Diurnal Birds of Prey)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Aplomado falcon, *Falco femoralis*.

[<http://www.arkive.org/aplomado-falcon/falco-femoralis/>, downloaded 6 March 2017]

TRAITS. *Falco femoralis* is a slender-bodied, 30-40 cm long-winged, long-tailed falcon that has an average wingspan of 90cm. Males weigh between 208-305g while females range between 271-460g. The upper portion of the falcon, particularly the head, has a distinctive white coloured band located over the eyes, extending around the head at the back (Fig. 1). A black stripe borders and it protrudes backwards from the side of the eyes. Beneath this is the white throat and cheeks and a second black stripe extending in a downward direction from the base of the bill. The primary feathers and tail are essentially black, with the latter having thin white bars and a white tip. The abdomen is of a cream to pale red-brown colour sometimes with black streaks separated from the darker yellow coloured belly by a horizontal, white flecked black band. Its feet and eye-ring are yellow to yellow-orange in colour (Howell and Webb, 1995; ARKive, 2009).

DISTRIBUTION. Widespread (Fig. 2), ranging from the southern tip of the United States through portions of Central and South America (on either sides of the Andes) and the Caribbean to Tierra del Fuego. They can inhabit a range of altitudes from about 4,600m above sea-level in areas of the Andes to lowland areas. *Falco femoralis* however do not thrive in moist tropical forests like the Amazon Basin (IUCN 2016). It is a rare visitor to Trinidad and Tobago.

HABITAT AND FEEDING. The habitat consists of open areas like dry neotropical savannas, desert grasslands, woodlands and marshes with scattered shrubs and trees. The falcon feeds on small vertebrates and large invertebrates. Of these, small birds which typically weigh one-fifth to one-half of the falcon's weight constitute the bulk of its prey (Fig. 3). However, *Falco femoralis* have been observed consuming birds like the cattle egret and plain chachalaca, which are larger than themselves (iNaturalist, 2017). Other known avian prey of *Falco femoralis* include sandpipers, quail, pigeons, nighthawks, ground doves, fledgling hummingbirds and teal (Hector 1985). In Brazil, *Falco femoralis*, have been noted trailing maned wolves, feeding on birds flushed by them. They can also be viewed soaring at insects that hunt at dusk and eating them on the wing (iNaturalist, 2017). These insects make up the invertebrate prey and it comprises beetles, dragonflies, butterflies, bees, wasp, etc. Aplomado falcons are also known to hunt, either singly or cooperatively (usually members of a pair), at burning fields (iNaturalist, 2017).

BREEDING. Nests are generally old unoccupied nest of other birds like ravens or hawks. They are primarily built of sticks, situated in trees, on power poles and sometimes on the ground. Their clutch size is 2-3 eggs, white with multiple brown spots and blotches covering the entire shell (Fig. 4). In Argentina, these eggs are on average measure 42-46 x 34-36mm. The breeding season varies per location, in Mexico it occurs from February to August, in Argentina from September to January and in Chile from November. The average incubation period and nestling period (Fig. 5) is about 32 days and 33-37 days respectively (GlobalRaptor, 2011).

BEHAVIOUR. At the commencement of the breeding season both male and female start courting each other. This behaviour includes remarkable aerial displays, quiet e-chup calls, loud calls and food exchanges. Once the eggs are laid both partners incubate the eggs although the female does most of the incubation. Males take charge of acquiring food for himself and mate. As males are smaller than females they develop faster and leave the nest before the larger female siblings. Young aplomado falcons usually inhabit their parents' territory for 1-2 months obtaining food and protection. While learning to hunt *Falco femoralis* may accidentally fly into fences. During the early morning, they hunt from perches for birds and at dusk for insects. They are also infamous for stealing food from other birds of prey. *Falco femoralis* often hunts in tandem usually with the male initiating an attack and the female following, however if she does not the male calls out to her. Female may also flush and pursue birds from bushes. If uneaten they hide food for later and defend these leftovers from other birds (GlobalRaptor, 2011; Bouglouan, 2009).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. *Falco femoralis*, despite having a decreasing population trend, is listed by IUCN as Least Concern because of their large range. They do not tend to the vulnerability threshold under the range size criterion, population trend criterion, or population size criterion (IUCN, 2016).

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Distribution of aplomado falcon, *Falco femoralis*.

[<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=22696450>, downloaded 6 March 2017]



Fig. 3. Feeding aplomado falcon, *Falco femoralis*.

[<http://www.oiseaux-birds.com/card-aplomado-falcon.html>], downloaded 7 March 2017]



Fig. 4. Artificial nest with aplomado falcon, *Falco femoralis* eggs.

[http://gallery.globalraptors.org/main.php/v/Falco_femoralis/100_0667.JPG.html], downloaded 7 March 2017]



Fig. 5. Young aplomado falcons, *Falco femoralis*.

[<http://www.arkive.org/aplomado-falcon/falco-femoralis/image-G51877.html>, downloaded 8 March 2017]

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