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Breeding and behaviour

Compared to many birds, the reproductive period of raptors is prolonged. Even the Southern Boobook, Australia's smallest owl, takes at least 5 months to complete a breeding effort, about the same length of time as a Peregrine Falcon. Kestrels and Black-shouldered Kites have quicker breeding cycles reflecting a more *r*-selected breeding strategy (i.e. more chicks, less care per chick) and taking advantage of irruptions of mammalian prey. Except for the Black-shouldered Kite, Canberra's raptors breed seasonally, once a year beginning in autumn (Powerful Owls), winter (large eagles), early spring (medium-sized falcons, small eagles) or late spring for other species. Most raptors establish nesting territories large enough to contain nests and roosts, and enough space for both the male and female to hunt in from incubation to post-fledging dispersal. Fierce territorial aggression early in the breeding season probably reflects this long-term goal. Brown Falcon males and females are particularly scrappy and noisy, kestrels too can openly battle with neighbours or other rivals. Wedge-tailed Eagles tend to aerial display, including 'pot-hook' displays, and so do Little Eagles all the while giving a characteristic whistling call, but both of these eagles can physically battle rivals (Figures 11.1, 11.2); Hobbies, Peregrines and accipiters all aerially display.

Raptors show fidelity to these defended territories, reoccupying them in consecutive years. It is common for one or both members of the pair to return annually to the same nesting area, often to the same nest site, until death or some environmental change causes disruption to this pattern (Craighead and Craighead 1956). Such fidelity to one breeding area enhances breeding success and the