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OBSERVATIONS ON THE NESTING OF THE BLACK-CHESTED BUZZARD-EAGLE (*GERANOAETUS MELANOLEUCUS*) IN PERU

PETER SCHOONMAKER

The Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle (*Geranoaetus melanoleucus*) is a fairly common raptor in western South America from the Merida Andes to Tierra del Fuego, and in southeastern South America from Paraguay and São Paulo, Brazil to Santa Fe, Argentina (Blake 1977:320). Breeding has been reported for Venezuela (Meyer de Schauensee 1978:39), Peru (Pearson and Ralph 1978:17), Chile (Johnson 1965:240, Brown and Amadon 1968:568), Argentina (Hudson 1920:48) and Tierra del Fuego (Humphrey et al. 1970:157). I report here additional details concerning nesting, prey, and behavior of this species.

All observations were made with a 15× to 60× spotting scope from a ridge 40 m above and 200 m from a Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle nest situated on a cliff near Olmos, Depto. Lambayeque, in northwestern Peru. The cliff is part of a small chain of 1,200-m high peaks known as Cerro Liqurnique, which rise from a 50-m high scrub-desert floor adjacent to the western Andean foothills. The highly dissected peaks are forested with trees of 5 to 15 m including *Loxopterygium lusango, Cavanillesia platanifolia* and *Bombax* sp. The desert floor vegetation is characterized by the trees and shrubs *Prosopis juliflora, Acacia* sp., *Bursera graveolens, Capparis angulata, C. ovalifolia* and *Cordia rotundifolia,* and by the cacti *Cereus* sp. and *Opuntia* sp. (Tosi 1960:32–96). The rainy season, which is undependable and often inconsequential lasts from January to April, and deluges known as El Niño occur periodically.

My observations began at 18:00, 26 May 1982, when I heard repeated screams from the direction of the cliff. The following day at 06:30 I spotted a nearly fledged Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle feeding on a 0.4-m long olive-green snake in a stick-nest 35 m above the ground on the 120-m cliff. The nest was 1.5 m in breadth, 1 m from its outer edge back to the cliff wall, and 0.6 to 0.8 m in height. It was built on an outwardly sloping ledge and was composed mainly of dry sticks approximately 0.5 to 1.0 m long and 0.5 to 2.0 cm in diameter. These sticks appeared to come from a species of dry low bush devoid of foliage and common to the hillsides above 250 m. About 12 columnar cacti acted as structural supports along the front of the nest. The cliff was oriented south-southeast, and the nest received direct sun from about 09:00 to 11:00. Other investigators have reported similar nests and nest sites, and have indicated that trees are also used (Johnson 1965, Brown and Amadon 1968).

Very little natal down remained around the head, neck and lower breast of the nestling. Elsewhere, the juvenal plumage was a mottled light brown with amber streaking on the face and upper chest and white streaking on the breast and wings. Several times the nestling hopped up and hovered over the nest for 1 to 2 s. The nestling's vocalizations were most intense and frequent in early morning and late afternoon, but could be heard no less than every 10 min throughout the day. The pitch and tonal quality of these calls were similar to the adults', but screams occurred in 5-s bouts at the rate of 0.8 screams per second whereas the adults' cackling call typically lasted 2 s with two to four screams per second.

During a total of 18 h and 51 min of observations on 27, 29 and 30 May, I saw the nestling feed on two snakes, a Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) and a small mammal (either a vizcacha, *Langidium peruanum,* or a young fox, *Dusicyon* sp.). Other investigators have reported a predominance of rodents, lagomorphs and other small mammals in the diet of this species (Johnson 1965, Brown and Amadon 1968, Schlatter et al. 1980). There is some uncertainty about the importance of reptiles and birds in the diet, but they apparently account for a small fraction of *Geranoaetus*' prey; Schlatter et al. (1980) found 129 rodents, 32 lagomorphs, 7 reptiles and 2 birds in 120 pellets collected in Chile. In coastal areas, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagles have been reported to feed on carrion (Hudson 1920, Brown and Amadon 1968, Humphrey et al. 1970), and seasonally on insects (Brown and Amadon 1968, Koepcke 1970).

Only twice did I see an adult on or near the nest. On 29 May, at 15:00 I saw an adult Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle rising up from the nest and then saw a dead owl that had not been there minutes before. Immediately afterward, both adults stood together briefly on white-washed ledges 70 m above the nest. On 30 May, at 13:40 an adult approached the nest in a fast glide with an olive-green 1-m long snake in its talons. The adult landed and allowed the nestling to hop onto the snake and mantle over it, screaming. The adult left the nest after 20 s. At 11:59 on 29 May, one of the adults made a steep dive at a lone Andean Condor (*Vultur gryphus*) 200 m from the nest. Eight minutes later both buzzard-eagles chased the same condor now 1 km from the nest, one diving at it and the other rising up to it from below.

Very little is known about the timing and duration of nesting in this species. Grossman and Hamlet (1964:261) reported a combined incubation and nestling period of at least 60 days; this indicates that the eggs at the nest I watched were laid in late March to early April. Such a nesting period differs markedly from the August–November period reported for Chile (Johnson 1965, Brown and Amadon 1968). In summary, the habits of this particular pair of Black-chested Buzzard-Eagles appeared to be typically aquiline and generally consistent with data presented by other investigators, with differences attributable to geographic location, local habitat, and limited observation time.

These observations were made while I was a member of the Andean Condor Project, directed by Michael Wallace and Stanley Temple, Department of Wildlife Ecology, University of Wisconsin. I thank Gustavo del Solar for his hospitality and logistic support in Peru, and James Enderson for reviewing the manuscript.

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4619 N.W. Barnes Road, Portland, Oregon 97210. Received 29 April 1983. Final acceptance 24 October 1983.

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COMMENTARY

In his article "Analysis of Geographic Variation in the Townsend's Warbler" (Condor 85:385–391, 1983), Michael L. Morrison barely avoided providing a valid subspecific name despite his stated intent not to do so. He stated (p. 388) that ". . . two identifiable populations of Townsend's Warbler can be distinguished with sufficient accuracy to meet 'accepted' subspecies criteria . . . ." He further provided (p. 389 and Table 1) diagnostic characters. Figure 3 of the paper is a photograph of part of a specimen and its attached labels, on which a handwritten trinomial and the word "Type" are plainly evident. This combination of name and indication satisfies all applicable provisions of Article 11 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (1964) for availability **in spite of** the facts that Morrison indicated in the caption to the figure that he was not designating the illustrated bird as a type and (p. 390) that he was refraining from naming the subspecies because he was uncertain of its breeding grounds. The Code does not stipulate that intent is necessary for the availability of a name, and in this instance the facts are contrary to the stated intent. The subspecific name in the figure can only be considered a valid name of a subspecies, attributable to Morrison, albeit a name inadvertently published.

On page 390 of the article, however, Morrison stated: "In the event that a subspecies should in the future be formally named, I suggest that Grinnell's name [shown in Figure 3] for this population be used . . . ." According to Article 15 of the Code, "After 1960, a new name proposed conditionally . . .is not available." Thus the name shown in the photograph is **not** available under Article 15 despite the fact that it meets the provisions of Article 11. The accidental naming of a subspecies was narrowly averted. We urge authors, reviewers, and editors of taxonomic papers to be fully acquainted with the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, and to consider its provisions when writing and studying a manuscript.

RICHARD C. BANKS and GEORGE E. WATSON, *National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC 20560.*

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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Sincerely, Ralph W. Schreiber, President.

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