

AMERICAN KESTRELS EAT TROUT FINGERLINGS

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Abstract.—American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) captured and ate brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), a type of prey not previously recorded for kestrels. A trout was pirated from a Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) in one instance, and a trout inadvertently cast up on the bank was taken in the second. The use of fish as food illustrates the plasticity in foraging behavior of kestrels.

FALCO SPARVERIUS SE ALIMENTA DE ALEVINOS DE TRUCHAS

Resumen.—Se informa por primera vez a individuos de *Falco sparverius* depredar sobre alevinos de truchas. En una ocasión un falcón le quito un alevino a un icterido (*Quiscalus quiscula*) y en el segundo caso una de estas aves depredó sobre un pez que se encontraba atrapado entre yerbajos. El uso de peces en la dieta de esta aves pone de manifiesto su plasticidad en la conducta de forrajeo.

Although American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) feed on a wide variety of invertebrates, small birds, and small mammals (Heintzelman 1964, McAtee 1935, Sherrod 1978), fish have not been recorded previously as prey. While investigating wildlife depredation at central Pennsylvania fish hatcheries (>900 h of observation) we recorded 18 instances of hunting by kestrels. Most foraging activities were restricted to the periphery of the hatcheries, characterized by open field or pasture habitats. Small mammals and insects were attacked in 16 cases; but in two cases, kestrels captured and consumed small brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*).

On 18 Jun. 1985 at 1530 EDT, an adult male kestrel was perched in a large American Elm (*Ulmus americana*) approximately 120 m from the hatchery. At the same time, about four or five Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) were searching the edges and shallow water areas of raceways for food. Typically, grackles lean out over the water from the banks of a raceway and lunge at close passing fish (pers. obs.). Twice, the kestrel dove at grackles that were "fishing." In each case, the grackles ducked away from the attack. Following each attack, the kestrel returned directly to the original perch.

At about 1538, the kestrel directed a third attack at a foraging grackle that had just successfully captured and begun subduing a 10 cm fingerling. Although the kestrel hit the grackle with sufficient force to jolt the fingerling free, the grackle escaped, apparently unharmed. The kestrel then stood on the ground and watched the flopping fingerling. After 15 s, the kestrel seized the fish in its talons and flew directly to the original perch, where the fish was decapitated and then completely devoured.

On 30 May 1986 at 0847 EDT, a female kestrel was perched on a fencepost at the edge of another hatchery while several Common Grackles were actively pursuing fingerlings from the banks of raceways. Workers

had finished feeding the fish and cleaning the gates between pools about 10 min earlier, during which time a live fingerling (approximately 8 cm) was cast out inadvertently with debris onto the grass beside a raceway. Following several minutes of head-bobbing, the kestrel dove directly toward the still moving fish, seized it, and carried it in its feet back to the fencepost. After subduing the fish, removing its head, and consuming several bites, the kestrel flew away carrying the fish. The capture and consumption of these fish illustrate the flexible foraging capabilities of kestrels to a potential foraging situation.

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