

## APLOMADO FALCON STEALS PREY FROM LITTLE BLUE HERON

WILLIAM S. CLARK

4554 Shetland Green Road  
Alexandria, Virginia 22312 USA

PETER H. BLOOM

National Audubon Society  
13611 Hewes Avenue  
Santa Ana, California 92705 USA

LYNN W. OLIPHANT

Veterinary School  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0W0, Canada

**Abstract.**—A juvenile male Aplomado Falcon (*Falco femoralis*) was observed to steal crayfish (*Cambarus diogenes*) from Little Blue Herons (*Egretta caerulea*). Crayfish are not known to be a common prey item of the Aplomado Falcon. To our knowledge this is the first instance of piracy reported for this falcon. Falcons of the genus *Falco* are seldom reported to take prey from other birds; fewer than half of the 39 *Falco* species have been observed doing so.

### INDIVIDUO DE *FALCO FEMORALIS* LE ROBA PRISA A INDIVIDUO DE *EGRETTA CAERULEA*

**Resumen.**—Un macho juvenil del falcón *Falco femoralis* le robó un camarón (*Cambarus diogenes*) a una garza (*Egretta caerulea*). Los camarones parecen ser una presa atípica para estos falcones. Este parece ser el primer informe de piratería en esta especie de falcón. Son raros los informes del robo de presas a otras aves por parte de falcones del género *Falco*. Menos de la mitad de las 39 especies en el género, han sido informadas hacerlo.

Piracy is a common foraging tactic used by many predatory birds (Meinertzhagen 1959). However, Brockman and Barnard (1979) report this behavior for only seven of the 39 species of *Falco*. No records of piracy are known for the Aplomado Falcon (*Falco femoralis*), and no records exist of falcons stealing from birds other than raptors.

On 4 Jan. 1984 we observed an Aplomado Falcon take a crawfish (*Cambarus diogenes*) from a Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) near Lerdo de Tejada, Vera Cruz, Mexico. We first sighted the falcon, a juvenile male by plumage and size (Clark and Wheeler 1987), at 1530 CST perched on a wooden fencepost in a wet pasture. We watched the falcon fly from and return to the post with prey. Using a 20× telescope, the prey item was identified as a crayfish. As this seemed an unusual prey for an Aplomado Falcon, we followed the actions of this falcon more closely to determine how the prey was acquired. A few minutes later, the falcon made a short straight-line flight of about 20 m directly at a Little Blue Heron, which stood on the ground. The heron flew aside as the falcon approached it, and the falcon grabbed a crayfish on the ground and flew back to the fencepost, where it consumed this prey. The falcon repeated this piracy on another Little Blue Heron in an identical manner.

While we did not observe the crayfish in the beak of either heron, we feel that they abandoned the crayfish as the falcon approached. Since our initial observations were directed at the falcon, we did not see either heron capture or try to consume the crayfish. However, we think that either behavior is what attracted the falcon's attention and triggered its piratical behavior. Later, the falcon captured a lizard (unknown species) after a short flight to the ground and returned to its perch to eat it. When we left the area at 1630, the falcon was still perched on the fencepost.

Piracy may be more widespread in the genus *Falco* than the above-mentioned literature search would indicate, considering our observation, those of Walter (1979) who describes intraspecific piracy among Eleonora's Falcons (*Falco eleonora*) as being common near the colonial nesting areas, and Cade's (1982) accounts of piracy for three additional species; the Brown Falcon (*F. berigora*), the Black Falcon (*F. subniger*), and the Saker (*F. cherrug*) as reported in the species section for the Laggard Falcon (*F. jugger*).

The Little Blue Heron has been reported previously as the victim of piracy by Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*), Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*), and White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) (Brockman and Barnard 1979), but not by any raptors.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Dean Hector for helpful comments on an earlier version of the manuscript and Brian Wheeler and Melinda Leach for assistance in the field.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- BROCKMAN, H. J., AND C. J. BARNARD. 1979. Kleptoparasitism in birds. *Anim. Behav.* 27:487-514.
- CADE, T. J. 1982. *Falcons of the World*. Cornell U., Ithaca.
- CLARK, W. S., AND B. K. WHEELER 1987. *Field guide to hawks of North America*. Peterson field guide ser. no. 35. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- MEINERTZHAGEN, R. 1959. *Pirates and predators*. Oliver & Boyd, London.
- WALTER, H. 1979. *Eleonora's falcon*. U. Chicago, Chicago.

Received 14 Sep. 1988; accepted 25 Feb. 1989.