

PRAIRIE FALCON CARRIES STICK TO NEST

by

John C. Barber

Division of Birds

Room E-607 NHB

Smithsonian Institution

Washington, D.C. 20560

On 27 March 1976, I watched a male Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) carry a stick in its talons during a 91-meter (300-foot) flight from a cliff and across a canyon to a nest scrape on a ledge in Aravaipa Canyon, Graham County, 16 km (10 mi.) west of Klondyke, Arizona. The nest scrape was on a cliff facing due east, in a small pothole under an overhang, approximately 12 meters (40 feet) from the top of the cliff and 46 meters (150 feet) from its bottom. The stick was approximately 20 cm (8") long and 13 mm ($\frac{1}{2}$ ") in diameter, and was deposited on the nest ledge. The male flew off the ledge without the stick about 15 seconds after its arrival. The male was silent during the flight to and from the nest site. The female was perched above and to the south of the scrape and did not react with any movements or vocalizations to the male's behavior.

Judging by the timing of two other nests in this canyon, the incident occurred two or three days before the first egg would have been laid. The scrape was deserted before June 1, for unknown reasons. I could not recover the stick because of the degree of overhang and the steepness of the cliff.

The literature does not contain any previous record of such behavior. Nest-building in the larger falcons has not been recorded in the field with the exception of several undocumented cases (cf. Brown and Amadon, 1968, *Hawks, Eagles, and Falcons of the World*, McGraw-Hill, New York, pp. 839 and 842). Amadon (pers. comm.) has reaffirmed his earlier statement (p. 839 above) that the larger falcons probably do not build their own nests. The idea that the male may have flown with the stick in reaction to me is unlikely as I was hidden during the entire flight. Other Falconiformes sometimes bring sticks to the nest while the female is incubating, instead of bringing food, as reported by Schnell for the Goshawk (*Condor* 60:382) and Barber and Schnell for the Mexican Black Hawk (unpublished observations), but at this time the female was not incubating.

This incident appears to be a previously unreported type of pair-bonding behavior for the Prairie Falcon, but whether or not it was unique to this individual is uncertain. The publication of this note may stimulate further discussion.

Dean Amadon, M. Ralph Browning, Frank L. Beebe, and Richard R. Olendorff made helpful comments on this note. Their help is gratefully acknowledged.