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AN OBSERVATION OF THE AERIAL COURTSHIP OF THE RED-TAILED HAWK

by

Mark Andrew Springer
Department of Zoology
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio 45056

On April 5, 1976, while in an observation blind 35 feet from a Red-tailed Hawk nest at Alum Creek Reservoir in Delaware County, I observed the aerial courtship of the Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*). As the pair flew into the thermals, both hawks participated in dives, barrel rolls, and ascents. While coming out of independent dives, the birds were observed to make contact with their talons. During the three-second contacts, the birds spiraled downward and then separated. Typical dives and ascents followed each of the two encounters. As the female began to return to the nest, the smaller male approached her from above. With legs and tail extended downward, he dropped down and grasped the back of the female. She responded by raising her tail. The copulation lasted about two seconds after which both birds returned to the nest tree where normal copulatory behavior commenced.

Conner (1974, *Bird Banding*, Summer Vol., p. 269) noted that the male of a pair of Red-tailed Hawks made aerial contact with its mate, but the female did not respond by lifting her tail.