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CARRION UTILIZATION BY TWO SPECIES OF AUSTRALIAN GOSHAWKS

by

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Introduction

The Brown Goshawk (*Accipiter fasciatus*) and Grey Goshawk (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*) are reported to prey on live vertebrates and insects (Cayley 1968, Brown and Amadon 1968, Wattel 1973, Morris 1976, Frith 1976). The most favored prey items of these hawks are birds and small mammals (Brown and Amadon 1968, Wattel 1973, Frith 1976). Observations made by the author, however, indicate that these birds also include carrion in their diets.

Observations

Three observations of carrion-feeding (one by *A. fasciatus* and two by *A. novaehollandiae*) were made during routine field work in southeastern Queensland, Australia. They are presented below in chronological order.

The first observation was made in open, pastoral land at Maleny (26° 46', 152° 51') on 27 November 1969. A single, immature female *A. fasciatus* was flushed from cover within a hedge. This bird attempted to carry a heavy food item for a short distance before abandoning it. I found the food to be a piece of cowhide, the adherent flesh of which was in an advanced state of decomposition.

The second observation was made along a roadway through subtropical rainforest near Kenilworth (26° 36', 152° 44') on 17 November 1974. A lone female *A. novaehollandiae* was observed feeding on the carcass of a small wallaby (*Thylogale thetis*) which had been killed by motor traffic. The carcass was bloated, but little smell of decomposition was apparent.

The final observation was made in similar habitat to the preceding, near Imbil (26° 28', 152° 41') on 23 September 1977. A male *A. novaehollandiae* was flushed from a road-killed *T. thetis* carcass, where it had been feeding. This carcass was bloated with a pronounced smell of decomposition.

Discussion

Apparently only the Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), has been previously recorded taking

carrion (Sutton 1927, Brown and Amadon 1968). Unfortunately, these records do not assist in the interpretation of the above observations. There was no evidence to suggest either prey scarcity or inability of these three individuals to secure active prey. The *A. fasciatus*, in particular, was observed at other times to make successful captures of Honey eaters (Meliphagidae), the Clamorous Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*), and small rodents (Muridae). The absence of regular encounters of the same individuals taking carrion or either species taking carrion elsewhere, in addition to the absence of published records of such behavior, suggests that the above cases were rare, opportunistic events.

Literature Cited

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Country Life Book of Birds of Prey. Gareth Parry and Rory Putman. Country Life Books, London, 1979. 120 pages, 35 color plates. £20.

Recently there has been a deluge of books about birds of prey on the market, some aimed at the specialist, the majority at a much wider field. This latest volume is of the latter variety—a coffee-table spectacular containing 35 color plates of raptors—including owls—which have been recorded in the British Isles. It is of only marginal interest to the serious ornithologist.

The text by Rory Putman is both accurate and readable but breaks no fresh ground. The book is designed to show off the paintings of Gareth Parry. Here the reviewer wishes he could be more complimentary. Although Parry displays very considerable technical skill, many of his pictures appear highly contrived and static. The immense detail overwhelms the eye, and the living bird is lost.

The book is beautifully bound and printed but marred by a series of irritating errors. The distribution maps are out of date, e.g., Peregrine and Montagu's Harrier. The photographs have been poorly selected and greatly blown-up—the one of the Sea Eagle is so badly touched up it appears grotesque! The plate purporting to show a typical Merlin habitat is totally misleading, and to add insult to injury the drawing of a Goshawk's bill shows a falcon's tooth.

It may well appeal to the drinkers of erstaz coffee, but those who can tell a hawk from a handsaw will doubtless invest their dollars somewhere else.—R. B. Treleven