



Figure 1. A Marsh Hawk carrying her chick back to the nest.

KESTREL ROBBING BARN OWL

by

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At approximately 10:30 hours on 30 January 1971, while walking along a lane close to Loch Ken, Dumfries, F. Oates and I saw a male Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) sitting on the apex of a chicken coop in the centre of a small field. It was uttering a very excited chatter: "Kee-kee-kee." Suddenly, a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) flew out of the coop carrying a small rodent toward an old barn. The Kestrel gave chase and attacked the owl from behind; it grabbed the rodent and appeared to be "back-peddalling" frantically, trying to take it from the owl. The latter continued flying, dragging behind it the Kestrel, which was still hanging on to the rodent when the owl disappeared into the barn. Neither bird was seen for half an hour; then the Kestrel was seen preening in the top of a tree. In the afternoon, we revisited the area and again saw the Barn Owl quartering the same field, at times only 4 m from us. It dropped into the grass twice, but did not appear to catch anything; on a third occasion it caught a large rodent and mantled it in the grass. Within seconds, the Kestrel arrived apparently from nowhere, and landed on the owl's back. The two rolled over in the grass, fighting for the prey; the falcon managed to take it and flew off over the valley. The Barn Owl lay in the grass for about a minute, with its beak open and wings spread, and then resumed hunting. When it next caught a small rodent, it swallowed it almost immediately.