

## LETTERS

### BALD EAGLE ATTEMPTS TO INCUBATE BONE

Unique items have been found in Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nests during breeding including clothespins, clorox bottles, golf balls, gunny sacks, light bulbs, stones, duck decoys, a rubber rat, and items of human clothing including shoes, lace-trimmed panties, and a child's sleeper (M.J. Broley, 1952, Eagle Man, Pellegrini and Cudahy, New York, and J.B. Holt, pers. comm.). The use of these items by eagles to adorn the nest is presumably to indicate to other eagles that the nest is occupied (M.V. Stalmaster, 1987, The Bald Eagle, Universe Books, New York). However, there is no reference in the literature of Bald Eagles attempting to incubate any of these items. We report here on such an occurrence.

On 1 June 1988, while attempting to collect addled eggs from a Bald Eagle nest near Mullet Lake, in northcentral lower Michigan, we discovered an adult female Bald Eagle attempting to incubate a bone from a round steak of beef. An adult had been observed in an incubating position during an aerial Bald Eagle census by Michigan Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologists on 31 March 1988 (J. Weinrich, pers. comm.). Since an adult was observed to still be on the nest on 26 May 1988 (G.E. Matthews, pers. comm.), we decided to collect the eggs since the adult was evidently incubating them for a minimum of 62 days, 27 days past the latest expected hatching date.

The female eagle was in an incubating position when we approached the nest which was located in a 17 m Quaking Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*). When we were within 100 m of the nest tree, the female left the nest and did not attempt to defend it. The bone was within a mound of nesting material within the nest lining. There were no eggs, eggshell fragments or any other indication that eggs had been laid by this pair. The bone was collected from the nest so that the adult would stop incubation. The bone measured approximately 7.2 cm in diameter and approximately 2.0 cm in height with an open marrow cavity. This compares with Bald Eagle egg measurements that average 7.0–7.6 cm in length and 5.3–5.8 cm in width (M.V. Stalmaster, *ibid.*). An aerial survey of this breeding area on 2 June 1988 showed no eagles in the vicinity of the nest (J. Weinrich, pers. comm.).

This was probably the initial breeding attempt by this nesting pair. Adults from this breeding area, possibly the same pair, constructed a new nest 4 km from the 1988 nest and successfully raised two fledglings in 1989.

We would like to thank David Best, James Bruce, Timothy Kubiak, Glen Matthews, Sergej Postupalsky, William Robinson, and Jerome Weinrich for their assistance. We thank John Giesy and William Robinson for reviewing an earlier draft of this note and giving helpful comments. The Bald Eagle banding project was funded by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Natural Heritage Program-Nongame Wildlife Fund, USDI-Fish and Wildlife Service, and USDA-Forest Service.—**William W. Bowerman IV, Department of Biology, Northern Michigan University, Marquette, MI 49855; JOHN B. HOLT, Jr., 858 Johnson Street, North Andover, MA 01845.**

### EGYPTIAN VULTURES STEAL FOOD FROM NESTLING GRIFFON VULTURES

Observations on food stealing were made in July 1980 at Los Arribes del Huebra, Salamanca, Spain. We observed an adult Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) on a Griffon Vulture's (*Gyps fulvus*) nest. In the nest was a Griffon Vulture nestling, close to fledging. The Egyptian Vulture ate food on the ledge while the nestling was facing the wall in evasive attitude. The chick had its back to the Egyptian Vulture, and called as it did to its parents. The Egyptian Vulture moved to an adjacent Griffon Vulture's nest and took more food while a second adult Egyptian Vulture came to the first nest. Adult Griffon Vultures were absent.

Five similar observations, made at the raptor refuge of Montejo de la Vega, Segovia, Spain, have been reported to us by F.J. Fernández and F. Martínez (pers. comm.). In two occasions the Egyptian Vulture was expelled from the nest and, in one of them, the nestling did it in the same way as has been explained by F. Alvarez, L. Arias de Reyna and F. Hiraldo (1976, Interactions among avian scavengers in southern Spain. *Ornis Scand.* 7:215–226) in aggressive

interactions at carcasses. In all the cases the Egyptian Vultures were adults. Both species share the same breeding area in the studied regions, the Egyptian Vulture being more dispersed in them.

Kleptoparasitism might be an important source of food for Egyptian Vultures. However, it has only been observed late in the nestling period, when Griffon chicks are often left unattended by adults. Griffon nests are ten times more abundant than those of Egyptian Vultures in these areas, and so the effect on each Griffon nest is probably small.—**Juan Pascual, Adv. Ramon y Cajal, 85, 28016 Madrid, Spain. Jose M. Santiago, Departamento de Zoología, Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Cantoblanco, 28049 Madrid, Spain.**

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#### COMMON BARN OWL (*Tyto alba*) RELEASES EGG WHILE IN FLIGHT

While monitoring nest boxes built for owls in Kings County, California, Keith Locke and I witnessed the release of an egg while in flight by a Common Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*). On 14 March 1991, Locke and I checked nest boxes erected for Common Barn Owls. One box was mounted on an oak tree limb, approximately 6 m above ground, with a 30-cm metal pipe. Our visit to the box at 1601 h caused an adult Common Barn Owl to flush from within. During the owl's flight, I noticed what appeared to be a very large amount of excreta being eliminated by the owl over an open area of pasture approximately 15 m south of the box. On close examination Locke and I found that the excreta was in fact an egg which had been released while in flight. Locke and I collected what remains we could and left the site after counting an additional six eggs in the box.

Locke and I returned to the nest box on 22 and 29 March, and 5 April. The remaining eggs were cold to the touch at every visit and no adults were present. I can find no reference in the literature to the release of an egg while in flight of a Common Barn Owl.—**Douglas E. Trapp, P.O. Box 281, Hanford, CA 93232-0281.**