

Korta rapporter – *Short communications*

Attempted predation of Northern Hawk-owl *Surnia ulula* by Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*?

Predationsförsök på hökuggla Surnia ulula av tornfalk Falco tinnunculus?

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On 21 September 2014 while driving west on the highway E10 in northern Sweden near Björkliden (68.42° N, 18.69° E) we stopped to watch a Northern Hawk-owl *Surnia ulula* perched on the top of a mountain birch snag. It then flew west along the road at tree-top level immediately over our position. As it passed us at approximately 50 meters, we were startled when the hawk-owl was attacked by a Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*. The Kestrel was clearly a large female (based on size and orange colouration with dark primaries) approximately the same length and wing-span as the Hawk-owl but with a smaller body size. They locked talons and the Kestrel awkwardly flew/fell away with the Hawk-owl into the birch forest.

Wanting to know the outcome of the attack, we immediately ran into the forest where we flushed the Kestrel talons still locked with the Hawk-owl. From a distance of ten meters we could see the colouration of the female Kestrel who further revealed her identity by calling. Again, we took chase through the forest when we briefly lost them. We stopped and were alerted to their location by the calling of the Kestrel. As we approached, the calling Kestrel flushed from the ground leaving the dazed Hawk-owl behind. We stood five meters away and watched the Hawk-owl seemingly alert and looking around. After a few minutes it took

flight landing in a birch nearby and then flew away apparently uninjured.

Retracing our steps back to the car we recovered a hat placed in a birch to mark the location where we initially flushed the Kestrel and Hawk-owl in the forest. On the ground there was a small pile of Hawk-owl body feathers. Close inspection of the feathers revealed no blood or tissue attached to the tip of the feather shafts suggesting an attempt at predation by the Kestrel. These feathers appeared to be fright-moulted. Fright moult is a well-documented behaviour where a prey species sheds, typically body feathers, as an escape mechanism when attacked (Lindström & Nilsson 1988).

Although Kestrels are known predators of small passerines, rodents, lizards and insects, there is no mention in the literature of a kestrel predating on any species of owl (Cramp 1980). It is possible that the Kestrel upon seeing this predator flew in to mob the Hawk-owl and then shifted to predatory behaviour. Alternatively, Kestrels are documented to pirate food from other avian predators and scavengers (Balfour 1973, Reese 1973, Slade 1977, Korpimäki 1984). It is possible that this Kestrel perceived the hawk-owl to be carrying food and attempted to steal it. However, we did not see the Hawk-owl carrying food. Kleptoparasitism, i.e. food piracy, is suggested to evolve in some groups of birds as by-product of mobbing behaviour (Brockmann & Barnard 1979) but this paper shows that intraspecific food-stealing is effectively the same behaviour. A comprehensive review of the literature shows that certain orders of birds contain a disproportionate number of kleptoparasitic species. Birds in these orders occupy a limited range of ecological niches and are most commonly either predatory or dietary opportunists. Kleptoparasitism is particularly associated with certain ecological conditions, such as the availability of hosts feeding on large, visible food items and periods of food shortage. Birds show a wide range

of socially parasitic feeding interactions of which kleptoparasitism is one extreme. The parasitic pattern of food-stealing is likely to involve frequency-dependent selection and may be an example of an evolutionarily stable strategy.”,”URL”.”http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S000347279901854”,”DOI”.”10.1016/0003-3472(79). In this case, an individual mobs a potential predator carrying food. If the predator is driven away, their food may remain behind to reward the attacker, in this case the kestrel.

References

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Sammanfattning

När vi den 21 september 2014 körde på väg E10 nära Björkliden fick vi syn på en hökuggla i en björktopp. När ugglan sedan flög bort längs vägen attackerades den av en tornfalkhona. Fåglarna hakade i varandras klor och föll otympligt ner i björkskogen. För att se vad som skulle hända följde vi fåglarna in i skogen och där fann vi tornfalken och hökugglan på marken fortfarande i varandras klor. När vi närmade oss flög tornfalken iväg och lämnade den något förvirrade hökugglan. Hökugglan satt kvar och tittade sig omkring men efter några minuter flög den iväg och satte sig i en björktopp, så vitt vi kunde se oskadad. Vi följde våra fotspår tillbaka till platsen där vi först påträffade fåglarna. Där fanns en del hökugglefjädrar som vi inspekterade noga. Vi kunde dock inte finna blod eller vävnadsrester som kunde tyda på ett verkligt predationsförsök utan tolkade fjäderförlusten som resultat av skräckruggning, vilket är en känd flyktreaktion vid en attack. Tornfalkar tar allehanda byten men det omnämns inte i litteraturen att någon art av ugglor skulle utgöra byte. I vårt fall kanske tornfalken såg hökugglan och skulle mobba den men hastigt växlade om till jakt. Alternativt kan tornfalken ha trott sig se att hökugglan hade ett byte. Det är känt att tornfalkar kan stjäla byten från andra fåglar, ett beteende som föreslagits kunna utvecklas som biprodukt av mobbning. Enligt vad vi såg hade ugglan dock inget byte

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