

in Ontario. Biology Department, University of Toronto, paper written for MA degree.

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Notes

Probable Red-tailed Hawk predation on Herring Gull

At 1515h on 3 December 1989, we observed an adult Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) with outstretched wings mantling a prey item on the snow along Barnsdale Road about 500m east of Moodie Road, Nepean, Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. The hawk took flight as we approached and an examination of the prey showed it to be a freshly-dead first-year Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*). Feathers had been stripped from the neck region, and the neck, back of the head, and upper back had been partly eaten. There was no damage to the wings or legs, no obvious signs of injury elsewhere or of emaciation, and the corpse was still limp and not frozen (the temperature in the afternoon was -20°C), indicating that it had died very recently. We left after

about five minutes, returned at 1600h, and found the hawk still feeding on the gull. The next day the carcass was frozen stiff, and there was no sign of the hawk.

A Herring Gull is an unusual prey item, even for a species such as the Red-tailed Hawk which shows such broad dietary adaptability. Red-tailed Hawks have been documented as taking a wide variety of prey (summarized in Palmer 1988), but there are no reports of Red-tails preying on any species of gull nor any other member of the order Charadriiformes. Red-tails are known to be carrion-feeders, but the gull did not appear to have died from some other cause such as being struck by a vehicle, which is highly unlikely as Barnsdale Road is a little-travelled and snow-packed

rural road. Although the actual act of predation was not witnessed, it seems highly probable that the Red-tailed Hawk had struck and killed the gull.

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The threat display of the Black-capped Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*)

Black-capped Chickadees are so friendly, both to humans and to other birds, that one would expect them to lack a threat display, a supposition refuted by the following:

On 1 April 1979, a chickadee and an American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) were both feeding at a distelfink feeder which was hanging close enough to a window

that the birds were only 2m away.

When the goldfinch moved a bit closer, the chickadee flattened its whole body and turned its head up slightly. This pose was held until the goldfinch moved away. To this observer the effect of the black-marked head was one of a mouth so widely gaping that engulfment of the goldfinch was a distinct possibility.

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Possible reasoning by a Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*)

In lieu of suet, a piece of meat was hung from a branch of a small tree by a window. On 20 April 1938, a female Downy Woodpecker lit on the trunk and eyed the meat rather dubiously, as the morsel was swaying rather freely in a little better than moderate wind. Rather than move to the meat and use it as a perch while feeding, she waited

until the wind blew it close enough to her that she was able to clutch it with one foot. Then, drawing the offering to her, she fed in comfort, holding the meat with one foot while clinging to the trunk with the other.

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Approaching oblivion

Almost 60 years of studying birds has enabled me to see trends not evident to one who began his study in the 1960s. The diminution in numbers of almost all species, except Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*), has been so gradual that it is not apparent unless one resorts to graphs and mathematics, possible only when one has recourse, as have I, to years of records.

On 10 May 1989 my sightings of May migrants was so deplorable that, on my return home, I began to review my observations of that day of each year for the preceding 50; and then, because weather may have interfered with either my field work or the movement of the birds, I expanded the study period to include 9–11 May, thus bracketing the day in question. Further, the only field trips considered were those in the Toronto Ornithological Region, which is that part of Ontario lying within 30 miles of the Royal Ontario Museum building.

The absence of softbills about my home added to my depression. Where once warblers and vireos crowded around the bird bath and "year's firsts" brightened the apple tree, only the usual summer fare was making use of the former while but leaves and blossoms decorated the latter.

I am sure a similar study of my observations about my summer cottage near Huntsville, Ontario, would be just as discouraging.

Expatriate J. L. Van Camp, who has a cottage near mine and whose birding began in 1940, concurs with my conclusions. T. C. Swift, of Weston, Ontario, who began the same time as I and who is quite conversant with Toronto's birds, fully agrees with my pessimism.

Im summarizing my records, I examined all species, but the table herewith has been reduced to include only the perching birds and a few representatives of other orders. The first of the two figures given is the average number of individuals seen per hour of the total hours afield during that decade. The second number is the maximum seen in one day.

The letters after certain species refer to the following personal conclusions. Readers may form others.

- (a) Only a rare transient at Toronto until the 1940s.
- (b) Reflects decrease in black ducks and increase in Mallards.
- (c) Very rare at Toronto until the 1950s.
- (d) Reflects increased urbanization and decrease in farmland.
- (e) Reflects increase in ring-bills and decrease in herrings.
- (f) Field work carried out chiefly in a valley with gulls unseen.
- (g) Shows decrease in numbers.
- (h) Reflects water quality and absence of food.
- (i) Seen regularly in Etobicoke fields in 1960s.

Decade	1930s		1940s		1960s		1970s		1980s	
Days afield	6		7		9		5		4	
Hours afield	13		21		15		16.5		15.5	
Canada Goose (a)					0.13	2	0.48	8	2.77	13
A. Black Duck (b)			0.76	11			0.61	10		
Mallard (b)			0.19	4	0.27	3	6.91	108	2.65	10
Gadwall (c)									0.13	2
Ring-necked Pheasant (d)			0.39	3	0.13	2				
Ring-billed Gull (e)	0.54	6	4.76	50	(f)		1.45	23	20.00	200
Herring Gull (e)	0.31	1	2.71	50	(f)		1.27	20	0.13	2
Black-billed Cuckoo	0.15	1								
Whip-poor-will	0.08	1								
Chimney Swift (g)	8.38	60	2.52	255	0.73	10			0.06	1
Ruby-throated Hummingbird					0.07	1			0.06	1
Belted Kingfisher (h)	0.38	3	0.14	2			0.06	1	0.13	1
Red-headed Woodpecker			0.10	2	0.07	1				
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	0.08	1	0.10	1	0.07	1	0.06	1	0.13	1
Downy Woodpecker	0.08	1	0.14	3	0.20	2			0.06	1
Northern Flicker	1.77	5	3.05	19	0.80	4	0.30	2	0.39	1
Pileated Woodpecker							0.06	1	0.06	1
Eastern Wood-Pewee			0.05	1	0.07	1				
Willow Flycatcher									0.06	1
Least Flycatcher	0.46	5	0.10	2	0.27	3				
Eastern Phoebe			0.05	1	0.13	1				
Great Crested Flycatcher			0.19	2	0.13	1				
Eastern Kingbird			0.05	1	0.13	1	0.06	1	0.32	1
Horned Lark			0.05	1	0.20	3			0.13	1
Purple Martin	0.08	1	0.10	2	0.20	2	0.06	1	0.39	4
Tree Swallow			1.86	25			0.06	1	1.16	10
N. Rough-winged Swallow			1.33	15	0.27	4	0.12	2	0.32	4
Bank Swallow	10.69	100	1.57	25	0.47	4	0.48	6	0.90	
Barn Swallow	0.37	10	1.57	25	2.47	10	0.24	3	2.71	30
Blue Jay	0.31	2	0.10	1	1.67	10	0.48	4	0.71	4
American Crow	0.54	4	1.48	10	1.60	10	1.33	12	1.42	8
Black-capped Chickadee	0.15	2	0.05	1			0.30	2	0.26	3
Red-breasted Nuthatch					0.07	1				
White-breasted Nuthatch	0.08	1	0.05	1						
Brown Creeper			0.33	5						
House Wren	0.08	1	0.10	1	0.13	2	0.06	1		
Winter Wren			0.10	2						
Golden-crowned Kinglet			0.10	2						
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	0.46	4	3.24	50	0.40	3	0.50	5	0.06	1
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher			0.10	1						
Eastern Bluebird			0.10	1						
Veery	0.31	2	0.10	1	0.13	1	0.06	1		
Swainson's Thrush	0.38	3	0.10	1	0.20	2	0.55	4		
Hermit Thrush	0.08	1	0.10	1	0.20	2	0.55	4		
Wood Thrush									0.06	1
American Robin	6.62	24	7.43	75	2.00	4	2.00	14	4.19	16
Gray Catbird	0.23	1	0.14	2	0.40	2	0.12	1	0.32	2
Northern Mockingbird							0.06	1		
Brown Thrasher	0.15	1	0.38	3	0.87	4	0.18	1		
Solitary Vireo			0.10	2	0.07	1				
Warbling Vireo	0.15	2	0.05	1						

Decade	1930s		1940s		1960s		1970s		1980s	
Days afield	6		7		9		5		4	
Hours afield	13		21		15		16.5		15.5	
Golden-winged Warbler									0.06	1
Tennessee Warbler			0.05	1						
Orange-crowned Warbler	0.38	3	0.05	1						
Nashville Warbler	1.69	14	2.86	53	0.27	2	0.30	2	0.06	1
Northern Parula	0.54	6								
Yellow Warbler	0.23	2	0.29	4	0.13	2	0.12	1	0.58	6
Chestnut-sided Warbler	0.46	6	0.29	3						
Magnolia Warbler	0.23	3	0.19	2	0.20	3				
Cape May Warbler			0.33	4						
Black-throated Blue Warbler			0.14	1	0.07	1				
Yellow-rumped Warbler	0.08	1	2.86	30			0.12	2	0.13	2
Black-throated Green Warbler	0.38	2	0.67	10	0.37	1				
Blackburnian Warbler			1.33	20						
Palm Warbler			0.57	11	0.07	1			0.06	1
Bay-breasted Warbler			0.10	2						
Black-and-white Warbler	0.92	10	1.00	10	0.07	1	0.18	1	0.13	2
American Redstart					0.13	1				
Ovenbird			0.05	1	0.13	2				
Northern Waterthrush			0.05	1						
Canada Warbler			0.05	1						
Scarlet Tanager	0.15	1	0.05	1	0.20	2	0.12	1		
Northern Cardinal	0.155	1	0.14	2	0.07	1	0.06	1	0.32	3
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	0.15	2	0.19	3	0.47	3	0.36	2	0.26	2
Indigo Bunting			0.14	4	0.07	1				
Rufous-sided Towhee	0.08	1	0.05	1	0.20	2	0.06	1	0.06	1
Chipping Sparrow	0.69	6	0.71	6	0.27	2			0.32	2
Clay-colored Sparrow (i)					0.77	1				
Field Sparrow			0.14	2	0.07	1	0.12	2	0.13	2
Vesper Sparrow					0.67	6	0.06	1	0.13	2
Savannah Sparrow					0.13	2	0.12	2	0.13	1
Fox Sparrow									0.06	1
Song Sparrow	1.54	9	2.38	10	2.07	10	0.48	5	1.35	122
Lincoln's Sparrow			0.10	2	0.07	1				
White-throated Sparrow	2.00	12	0.67	6	2.33	20	1.64	14	1.55	22
White-crowned Sparrow			1.00	20	1.47	20	0.48	7	0.19	2
Dark-eyed Junco			0.10	1	0.27	4	0.12	2		
Bobolink									1.03	8
Red-winged Blackbird	0.08	1	3.05	50	20.20	125	1.94	20	10.45	50
Eastern Meadowlark			0.10	2	0.47	5	0.06	1	0.19	2
Common Grackle	0.62	4	1.52	10	1.90	20	2.18	14	11.60	50
Brown-headed Cowbird	0.23	1	0.90	10	3.80	50	0.18	2	0.32	3
Northern Oriole	0.08	1	0.33	3	0.20	2	0.48	7	0.19	2
Purple Finch					0.13	2				
House Finch									0.65	4
American Goldfinch			0.14	3	0.20	2	0.36	6	0.77	5

[Ed. Note — Scientific names of birds have been omitted; common names conform to the 6th edition of the AOU checklist.]

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