

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK FEEDS THROUGH A CHAIN LINK FENCE

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At approximately 07:45 on 12 March 1994, AJM, while driving past the U.S. Army's Waterways Experiment Station in Vicksburg, Warren County, Mississippi, noticed flapping at the bottom of a chain link fence. Upon stopping he observed a Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) struggling with a still living Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*). Both birds were on the ground and the hawk gripped the thrasher with talons on both feet, but the birds were on opposite sides of the chain link fence. The grass on both sides of the fence was mowed close. The hawk repeatedly tried to fly off with the thrasher, but the thrasher's size and struggling prevented the hawk from pulling it through the fence. Soon the thrasher stopped moving and the hawk was able to pull it through the fence and fly off with it.

Before pulling the thrasher through the fence, the hawk did not appear to eat a substantial portion of it, so its size was not much reduced. Instead, the limp body of the dead thrasher made it easier to pull through the fence.

In 1988, CN observed similar behavior by Sharp-shinned Hawks in Florida. He was holding Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) and Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) in an outdoor aviary for experimental purposes. On several occasions Sharp-shinned Hawks killed and ate cowbirds and blackbirds through the one inch mesh of the aviary fence. In these cases the hawks ate their prey in place and were often so intent that several Sharp-shinned Hawks were captured using a hand net.

In the Florida cases the prey were killed through the fence. In Vicksburg, we do not know if the Brown Thrasher was initially attacked through the fence or if it moved through the fence after being attacked.

Birds are the principal prey of Sharp-shinned Hawks and persistent pursuit of prey is a characteristic behavior of the hawk. Bent (1938) describes one Sharp-shinned Hawk that reached under the bottom rail of a fence to pull out a chicken and another that went through the rusty wire of a pheasant pen while chasing a sparrow.

LITERATURE CITED

- Bent, A.C. 1937. Life histories of North American birds of prey. Part 1. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 167.