

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Nesting of the Laughing Falcon.—Sheffler and van Rossem (Auk, 61, 1944:141) gave an account of the nesting habits and a description of the eggs and young of the Laughing Falcon (*Herpetotheres cachinnans*). Although these authors must be complimented for presenting information not previously recorded concerning the nesting habits and the young, their description of the eggs of this species is erroneous. A careful reading of their record of the two supposed nests of this species from which the eggs were taken indicates that in both instances they had been directed to a nest by a local boy and that they did not actually see a parent bird leave either nest. At one place a male was shot and a female was seen near a nest and at the other a pair of birds was seen near where a nest was found. Consequently the identity of the eggs was largely a matter of assumption, although it was a logical supposition because a female had been taken as she left a similar nest in which young were found.

Their description of the eggs was questioned in personal correspondence with the senior author shortly after the article was published but no correction has ever been made. At that time the wrong identification of the eggs was suspected because the measurements given were: "44.2×37.6 and 43.5×37.7 mm." These appeared altogether too small to represent the eggs of a bird as large as the Laughing Falcon. In addition their remarks that "the eggs . . . resemble those of an owl. . . pure white, and rather smooth in shell texture," obviously applied to the eggs of some species of owl and were entirely different from any known eggs of any species of the Falconiformes. Moreover in 1935 I received from a collector in Paraguay the skin of a female of the southern race, *Herpetotheres cachinnans queribundus*, together with an egg which was alleged to have been taken from the nest where the female was shot. This egg measures 56.5×45.6 mm. which is considerably larger than the measurements given by Sheffler and van Rossem. The egg is fairly well smeared over the larger part with rich reddish chestnut, and splashes of light red are scattered over the remainder. The shell where visible is white, rather rough grained, and entirely devoid of any gloss. Of course the identity of this egg can be questioned but it certainly is about the size and more the color of an egg to be expected from this species.

On the morning of March 28, 1953, while on a collecting trip in Mexico, I flushed a Laughing Falcon from a natural cavity in a huge cypress growing on the edge of the Sabinas River about 25 miles northwest of Mante, Tamaulipas. The opening was some 40 feet from the ground and the cavity was about two feet in diameter, extending down 30 inches. The bottom of the cavity was covered with a miscellaneous assortment of droppings, decayed wood and other debris with some old leaves but no other nesting material. Although it looked as though it had long been used as a nesting cavity, there was nothing in it. In the late afternoon we went back to this tree and the falcon again flushed from the cavity but it was not again inspected. On April 3, 1953, we returned to this nest in the hope of finding eggs but the previous day there had been heavy rain and the river was too high to attempt to get to the tree. At that time the falcons were neither seen nor heard.

About five miles down the river from this nest a native boy told us that he knew of the nest of a "Vaquero," the local name for the Laughing Falcon. He took us to another huge cypress. The top of this tree had been broken off about 60 feet from the ground and apparently there was a large depression in the top of the stub. No Laughing Falcons were seen in this vicinity and we were unable to flush anything from the top of the stub, but both the boy and a farmer who lived near assured us that several times they had seen a "Vaquero" go in and come out of the top of the stub. An attempt was made to climb to the top for an inspection, but the first limb was about 40 feet from the ground, and although the climb was not impossible with the aid of ropes, it was finally given up because the stub was heavily infested with large, black, vicious ants.

Although I was not successful in finding a nest with eggs, on April 16, 1953, Dr. T. C. Meitzen and Joe Johnson of Refugio, Texas, took an egg of the Laughing Falcon (*Herpetotheres cachinnans chapmani*) which they have presented to me. This was found about 12 miles north of Valles, San Luis Potosí. Dr. Meitzen's account of this is quoted: "Nest in a natural cavity about 12 inches in diameter and three inches deep, comparatively open from above and situated in the crotch where three large limbs had forked from the main trunk, about 35 feet from the ground. The nesting cavity contained no special lining other than the usual accumulation of debris. The nesting tree grew on a steep, rocky

hillside sloping into a dry arroyo and was in a rather open situation where only a few other trees were growing. The nesting site was first located April 13, 1953, when it held one fresh egg. The male was shot and crippled but was not secured. When the shot was fired the female flushed from the hollow, circled a few times and lit in the nesting tree. She was also shot at but apparently missed. On April 16 we returned to the nest and found it deserted but the egg was taken." This egg, shown on the accompanying plate, measures 58.0×44.6 mm. The ground color is entirely concealed with a thick

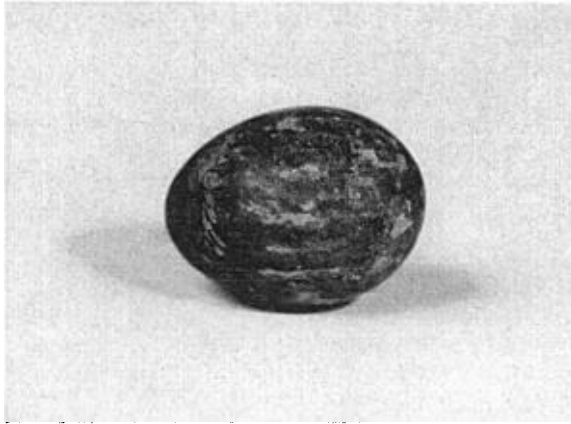


Fig. 1. Egg of *Herpetotheres cachinnans chapmani*, taken near Valles, San Luis Potosí, México, April 16, 1953.

wash of dark chocolate brown and a few splashes of burnt umber, but there are a few streaks of lighter yellowish brown where the pigment is thinner and appears to have been rubbed off when the shell was wet. In general appearance it can be matched with some types of eggs of the Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*).

Sheffler and van Rossem raise the question of the choice of nesting sites and the type of nest construction employed by this species in forested areas where cliffs are nonexistent. This question is answered by the two nesting sites in trees here described and by the nest from which Dr. Meitzen took an egg. It is well known that occasionally the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), which is normally a cliff nester, will use a natural cavity in a tree when cliffs are not available. Likewise the Sparrow Hawk (*Falco sparverius*) normally uses a natural cavity but will occasionally resort to a nest in a cliff if no tree cavities are available. In view of this adaptability to different nesting sites in allied species and the presently available information, it can now be assumed that the Laughing Falcon may nest either in a hole in a cliff or in a natural cavity of a tree, and that no nesting material is added in either case. I think that the use of a natural cavity in a tree constitutes the normal nesting site and that the use of a hole in a cliff would be an unusual occurrence. This is based on the fact that this species is resident and breeds over a greater part of its range where no suitable cliffs are available, but where natural cavities in trees are more or less common.—COL. L. R. WOLFE, *Kerrville, Texas, December 28, 1953.*

Body Temperatures of Botulistic Pintails.—An experiment to determine the effects of botulism on the body temperature of the Pintail (*Anas acuta*) was conducted at Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge, California, during the months of August and September, 1952. The data for this experiment were obtained from temperatures taken before treatment and after recovery of 118 pintail ducks suffering from botulism (*Clostridium botulinum* type C). A five and one-half inch, rapid-recording, binoc, etched-stem Taylor thermometer no. 21418 was inserted approximately two inches into the cloaca for a period of about two minutes to obtain the body temperature. The birds were sexed, aged, and after treatment with antitoxin and fresh water, marked with colored leg bands and placed in holding pens until they had recovered or succumbed.