

RED-HEADED FALCON PIRATES PREY FROM MONTAGU'S HARRIER

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Abstract.—An adult Red-headed Falcon (*Falco chicquera*) pirated a partially eaten bandicoot (*Bandicota* sp.) from an adult male Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) after an aerial pursuit. This report is the first instance of piracy described for this falcon. Fewer than half of the 39 species in *Falco* have been observed pirating prey.

INDIVIDUO DE *FALCO CHICQUERA* LE PIRATEA PRESA A INDIVIDUO DE *CIRCUS PYGARGUS*

Sinopsis.—Un adulto de *Falco chicquera* le pirateó a un individuo de *Circus pygargus* una presa de *Bandicota* sp. parcialmente ingerida, luego de una persecución aérea. Éste es el primer informe de piratería por parte de este tipo de falcón. De las 39 especies de *Falco*, menos de la mitad han sido observadas pirateando presas.

Piracy is seldom reported for the 39 species of falcons in the genus *Falco* (Cade 1982). Brockmann and Barnard (1979) report this behavior for only seven falcon species and Cade (1982) cites this behavior for three additional species. Clark et al. (1990) report a first instance for another. We could find no record of piracy by the Red-headed Falcon (*Falco chicquera*).

On 10 Jan. 1991, in western Gujarat, India, we observed an adult male Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) that was sitting on the ground eating. WSC approached stealthily to photograph the harrier and was about 15 m from it when it flushed, taking the prey with it. As it flew away it was closely pursued by an adult Red-headed Falcon. This chase lasted for more than a minute with the harrier going back and forth in front of us several times and making many maneuvers to avoid the attacks of the falcon. These attacks seemed to be directed toward the prey in the harrier's talons. The harrier was forced to climb with each attack. Finally, the harrier dropped its prey; the falcon swooped and caught it in the air and then flew to a short post and began eating. We approached the falcon in a jeep to within 15 m where we could clearly observe its booty through a spotting scope (20–60× zoom). The booty was the rear half of a small bandicoot (*Bandicota* sp.).

The falcon was judged to be an adult because of its unstreaked chestnut head and lack of rufous on its back and breast.

Of particular interest is that the falcon took prey from a larger raptor. In most cases of piracy, prey is taken by larger from smaller birds. Our photographs clearly show the harrier to be much larger in wingspan and

length. Published weights for both, however, are more nearly the same. Weights of male Montagu's Harriers are 227–305 g ($\bar{x} = 261$, $n = 13$) (Cramp and Simmons 1982). Weights of Red-headed Falcons from India were not found, but weights of females of this species from Africa (reported to be larger than Indian falcons) are 240 and 257 g (Cade 1982) and 305 g and “probably 190 g and over” (Brown et al. 1982:192).

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