

RED-TAILED HAWK PREYS ON ADULT SAGE GROUSE IN NORTHERN UTAH

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Numerous authors have documented that the Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) feeds predominantly, but not entirely, on mammals. Fitch et al. (1946) noted in California that the redtails diet reflected the relative abundance of prey species, such as ground squirrels, and changed to alternate species as squirrel abundance declined. Luttich et al. (1970) noted that mammals constituted 60 percent of redtail diets in their Alberta study area, and birds averaged 31 percent. Of bird remains found at active nests, 4 percent were forest grouse. Craighead and Craighead (1956) found that Sage Grouse occurred in only 1.6 percent of redtail diets in their Wyoming study area. They noted that in general, redtail's prefer to prey on small mammals but do occasionally prey on small birds. Wallestad (1976) noted that Montana redtails pose a threat to young Sage Grouse but not to adults.

I saw an adult female Red-tailed Hawk attack a female Sage Grouse near Six Mile Creek, Rich County, Utah, on 27 September 1978. The Sage Grouse was feeding in a moist meadow with approximately 35 others when I saw the approaching hawk. The group became visibly restless as the hawk approached within 100 m. When the red-tail had come within 50 m, a few birds began flushing. Almost immediately, the red-tail stooped and struck a single grouse. The grouse was struck approximately 2 meters above ground level, at the base of the back. The grouse and hawk remained together until they hit the ground. The hawk remained on top of the grouse until flushed by my approach. Examination of the grouse revealed that no bones were broken; however, the bird was unable to fly and appeared partially paralyzed. The wound consisted of several small punctures at the base of the back along both sides of the pelvis. The grouse was an adult female, weighing approximately 1500 g. Craighead and Craighead (1965) reported that adult female redtails averaged 1224 grams, approximately 269 grams (18 percent) less than the average female Sage Grouse. They also noted that, in general, only extremely aggressive redtails will attempt to kill an animal larger than themselves.

Literature Cited

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