

LETTERS

American Kestrel Kills Least Sandpiper. On 4 October 1988, while netting shorebirds at Windsor Reservoir (Weld County) in northeast Colorado, we observed approximately 100 shorebirds foraging on an extensive mudflat. Most birds were present in small (about 12 individuals) inter-specific flocks composed mainly of dowitchers (*Limnodromus* sp.), Baird's Sandpipers (*Calidris bairdii*) and Least Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla*). Between 1000 H and 1120 H we observed three attacks upon these flocks by a female kestrel (*Falco sparverius*). In the first attack the kestrel gained altitude and stooped at a flock in flight. After two unsuccessful stoops, the kestrel returned to a perch in a Peachleaf Willow (*Salix amygdaloides*) tree. In the second attack the kestrel stooped upon a different flock and successfully separated a small sandpiper from the flock. The kestrel chased this shorebird for approximately 45 seconds. During the chase, the kestrel worked the bird out over the reservoir and stooped 6 times as if trying to force the sandpiper lower. The sandpiper maintained an altitude of 30–35 m, however, and the kestrel discontinued pursuit and perched in a Plains Cottonwood (*Populus sargentii*) tree. At 1120 H the kestrel twice attacked a third flock, stooping from about 20 m, apparently trying to separate one individual from a flock of 4 Baird's Sandpipers and 1 Least Sandpiper. The Least Sandpiper became separated from the flock and flew over the water. The kestrel made a third stoop at this individual from a lower altitude (about 5 m) and came very close to it, perhaps half a meter. At this time the sandpiper was only a few decimeters above the water. On its fourth stoop the kestrel caught the sandpiper in the air, returning with it to a perch in a cottonwood.

Only one previous description of an American Kestrel hunting Least Sandpipers has been published (in California; G. Page and B.F. Whitacre, 1975, *Condor* 77:73–83). Our observation differs from Page and Whitacre's description in three respects. First, they observed male but not female kestrels hunting shorebirds. Second, kestrels in that study hunted over a salt marsh and not over mud flats. Finally, they observed kestrels hunting by plummeting to the ground and taking prey in thick vegetation. Although the American Kestrel may hunt and prey on shorebirds more often than previously thought, this predatory behavior is poorly known and deserves further attention.—**Gonzalo Castro and James A. Sedgwick, National Ecology Research Center, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4512 McMurray Avenue, Fort Collins, CO 80525-3400. Present address of Gonzalo Castro: Manomet Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 936, Manomet, MA 02345.**