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PREDATION ON A BALD EAGLE NESTLING BY A RED-TAILED HAWK

No incidents where a raptor has taken a bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nestling from a nest while the adult eagle was present have been reported. We observed an adult red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) remove a bald eagle nestling from a nest on Santa Catalina Island, California on 2 April 1996. The incident occurred while we were monitoring the eagle nest from about 300 m through a spotting scope as part of a study of nesting behavior in a reintroduced population of bald eagles impacted by DDE contamination.

Since 1989, bald eagle nests on Santa Catalina Island have had eggs with high DDE levels replaced with artificial eggs, and later healthy chicks have been reintroduced back into the nests. On 30 March 1996, we fostered 9- and 11-day-old nestlings into the nest where the predation occurred. On 2 April, the female eagle was observed on the nest in brooding posture. One of the introduced nestlings was obscured from view, probably sheltered by the female, while the other nestling was lying in front, approximately 25 cm away from the mother eagle. At 1018 H, a mature red-tailed hawk flew in and grabbed the nestling in front of the female. As the hawk took the nestling, the adult eagle vocalized and flapped its wings. Immediately, the female eagle flew from the nest chasing after the hawk. Less than a minute later, the female eagle returned to the nest with the nestling in its talons, placed it on the edge of the nest, and began brooding the other nestling that had been left unattended. The nestling removed by the red-tailed hawk did not move after it was returned, presumably killed either by the hawk or during its recovery by the eagle.

At 1022 H, the red-tailed hawk again tried to take the dead nestling, but it was unsuccessful. The male eagle was not seen in the vicinity of the nest until 1057 H, when it flew within 100 m of the nest over ½ h later. From 1103–1111 H, the female eagle fed the dead nestling to its nest mate and consumed part of the carcass herself.

We have monitored incubation and chick-rearing behavior of adult eagles on Santa Catalina Island at 14 nests since 1989. This is the only instance of predation on a nestling eagle that we have observed. However, in areas that red-tailed hawks and bald eagles commonly cohabitate, predation by red-tailed hawks may be a more frequent cause of mortality for nestling eagles.

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