

LETTERS

J. Raptor Res. 33(3):270

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FORAGING OF YELLOW-HEADED CARACARAS IN THE FUR OF A THREE-TOED SLOTH

Both the Yellow-headed Caracara (*Mitvago chimachima*) and the brown-throated three-toed sloth (*Bradypus variegatus*) inhabit low elevation areas from southern Central America to northern Argentina (Emmons 1990, Neotropical rainforest mammals: a field guide. Univ. Chicago Press, Chicago, IL U.S.A.; Sick 1993, Birds in Brazil, a natural history. Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, NJ U.S.A.). The sloth is generally limited to forested environments (Emmons 1990), while the caracara prefers more open habitat (Haverschmidt 1962, *Condor* 64:154–158; Sick 1993). Under natural circumstances, most interactions between these two species should be limited to forest edges. In metropolitan settings, however, species may be forced together in parks encircled by urban surroundings. In these situations, it may be easier to observe behaviors between species that remain undetected in more remote areas. Here, we describe the foraging on a brown-throated three-toed sloth by Yellow-headed Caracaras.

We observed the animals in the botanical garden of the Ciudad Universitaria in downtown Caracas, Venezuela, at approximately 1600 H on 16 November 1996. The sloth was 15–20 m above the ground in an isolated *Cecropia* tree, and was attended by two juvenile caracaras. The caracaras appeared to be picking from the fur of the sloth; our observational distance precluded us from seeing anything in the birds' beaks. The sloth showed no sign of defensiveness or aggression toward the caracaras even when they were foraging on its head and neck. It assumed a relaxed posture, reclining on a branch with its front legs extended behind its head. The behavior continued for 5–10 min, until we moved closer. At this point, the caracaras stopped their grooming behavior but remained within a few meters of the sloth. The caracaras appeared to be members of a larger group; we observed an adult and another juvenile in nearby trees.

Although previously undescribed, the nature of this interaction is not surprising. Yellow-headed Caracaras are known to forage by picking ticks and botflies from domestic livestock. When no source of appropriate ectoparasites is available, caracaras are opportunistic and may consume a wide variety of items including insects, fruit and carrion (Haverschmidt 1962). Thus, their opportunistic foraging in the fur of other slow-moving mammals may not be entirely unexpected. Sloths may represent a particularly attractive foraging substrate, as their fur contains a rich fauna of invertebrates, especially Lepidoptera (Waage and Montgomery 1976, *Science* 193:157–158).

We thank Jack Clinton-Eitniear, Joan Morrison, and Mel Sunquist for help in finding appropriate references, as well as Jack Clinton-Eitniear, David Houston, Joan Morrison, Mike Wallace, David Whitacre and an anonymous reviewer for comments on the manuscript.—**Alan H. Krakauer, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 3101 Valley Life Sciences Building, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-3160 U.S.A., and Thomas H. Krakauer, North Carolina Museum of Life and Science, 433 Murray Avenue, P.O. Box 15190, Durham, NC 27704 U.S.A.**

J. Raptor Res. 33(3):270–271

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COMMON BLACK-HAWK NESTING IN WEST-CENTRAL TEXAS

Common Black-Hawks (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) are obligate riparian nesters of the southwestern U.S. Although not federally listed, it is listed as Endangered in New Mexico and Threatened in Texas (Schnell 1994, Common Black-Hawk, Birds of North America, No. 122, A. Poole and F. Gill [Eds.], The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA U.S.A.). Once a regular nester along the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, all local breeders were extirpated by 1940, apparently the result of extensive habitat loss. In 1970, a small breeding population (about 10 pairs) was discovered along Lympia Creek of the Davis Mountains in Jeff Davis County, Texas (Oberholser 1974, The bird life of Texas. Vol. 1., Univ. Texas Press, Austin, TX U.S.A.; Schnell 1994). To date, this remains the only known regular