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## FIRST RECORD OF A BARRED FOREST-FALCON (*MICRASTUR RUFICOLLIS*) NESTING IN A CLIFF POTHOLE

Aaron J. Baker<sup>1</sup>, Oscar A. Aguirre-Barrera<sup>2</sup>, David F. Whitacre<sup>1</sup>, & Clayton M. White<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Peregrine Fund, 566 W Flying Hawk Lane, Boise, ID 83709.

<sup>2</sup>Fondo Peregrino, Parque Nacional Tikal, Flores, Petén, Guatemala.

<sup>3</sup>574 WIDB, Department of Zoology, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602.

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The six species in the genus *Micrastur* are small to medium-sized Neotropical forest-inhabiting falconids. With *Accipiter*-like short wings and long tails, forest-falcons are secretive, often crepuscular hunters (Thorstrom 1993). Though *Micrastur* spp. are often abundant, the first nest for the genus was not found until 1978 (Mader 1979), and the first Barred Forest-falcon (*Micrastur ruficollis*) nest was not described until 1990 (Thorstrom *et al.* 1990). Thorstrom (1993) spent considerable time in Petén, Guatemala studying this species and the congeneric Collared Forest-falcon (*M. semitorquatus*), finding 38 Barred and five Collared forest-falcon nestings, in 22 and five nest sites, respectively. All of these were in tree cavities, as was the nest described by Mader (1979). In addition, there is a published report of Collared Forest-falcons nesting in a ruined building (Cobb 1990, cited by Howell and Webb 1995). To our knowledge, no data are available on the nesting habits of the four other *Micrastur* spp. A report of nest-

ing of *M. gilvicolis* in a stick nest has been regarded as probably erroneous (del Hoyo *et al.* 1994).

Between 5 March–13 May 1996 we observed a pair of Barred Forest-falcons in Petén, Guatemala demonstrating nuptial behavior and utilizing a cliff pothole as a nest site. Each morning and evening of 5–10 March, 8–13 April, and 8–13 May 1996, we heard a male Barred Forest-falcon calling from the forest at the base of a 75 m tall by 85 m wide limestone cliff. On 10 May at 18:18, the male was observed with prey in his talons, vocalizing from the branch of a nearby tree, 15 m from the cliff base. The female appeared within seconds, took the prey from the male, and immediately began eating. At 18:25, the female flew to the cliff, landed on a ledge, cleaned her beak for several seconds, and then ran into a hole at the back of the ledge. We watched the hole entrance until 19:10, by which time the female had not reappeared. On 11 May at 05:40, the male was again

heard calling from the forest near the cliff. The female immediately emerged from the pothole, received prey from the male, fed on it, and re-entered the pothole, as on the previous day. The pothole had an entrance 0.2 m in diameter and was situated at the back of a ledge about 0.5 m deep by 5 m long, some 20 m above the base of the cliff, which was sheer and largely unvegetated. The ledge was sheltered from above by a large overhang and situated just below the level of the nearby canopy, resulting in an inconspicuous nest site physically similar to a tree cavity.

While this is apparently the first observation of a *Micrastur* forest-falcon nesting in a cliff cavity, the only detailed study of any member of the genus (that of Thorstrom 1993) was in an area devoid of cliffs. The nesting reported here suggests a certain amount of flexibility in terms of nest site selection. A pair of Collared Forest-falcons was observed to habitually frequent the rim and upper walls of a 100-m deep limestone sinkhole in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, and to enter potholes on the sheer, vegetation-spangled wall (DFW, G. Falxa, D. Ukrain, unpubl.). However, it was not known whether these forest-falcons were nesting in potholes; one exited a pothole with a bat, and hence they may have simply been foraging. This observation and that of Cobb (1990) of Collared Forest-falcons nesting in an abandoned building also suggest some flexibility in terms of nest sites used by members of this genus.

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