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Notes on the Mountain Caracara (*Phalcoeboenus megalopterus*) in the Argentine puna.—The Mountain Caracara (*Phalcoeboenus megalopterus*) is a conspicuous species in the Argentine puna zone. While not as abundant over large areas of the puna as are other caracaras (*Polyborus* and *Milvago*), in other habitats of Argentina, we found four pairs along the 70 km of road from Cuesta de Auzul Pampa to Abra Pampa, Jujuy Province (3500 m elev.). As is the case with *Polyborus*, *P. megalopterus* were concentrated near towns where they fed on carrion and refuse. Eighteen individuals were seen from one spot on the outskirts of Abra Pampa as they sat on power poles or fence posts. Three were collected as part of a larger study; 2 at Abra Pampa and 1 at Cuesta de Auzul Pampa. Although they were obtained randomly, all 3 had entire legs or portions of feet missing. Their wounds were healed and appeared to be old. The form of injury was identical to what we have previously seen in raptors that were victims of jaw traps. One adult was missing the right leg about 2 cm below the junction of tibiotarsus and tarsometatarsus, another adult was missing the hallux, and the subadult was missing the entire left foot. Still another adult seen appeared to be lacking an entire foot. Francois Vuilleumier (pers. comm.) has examined 34 specimens of *Phalcoeboenus* during the course of his continued interest in caracaras and has noted 3 *Phalcoeboenus* with missing toes or feet: One from Chile near the Argentina boundary was missing the foot and had a well-healed leg similar to our finding.

Other genera of caracaras from different habitats have not shown a similar incidence of foot injury. We traveled 6586 km of roads in Northern Argentina and observed more than 400 *Milvago chimango*, 10 *M. chimachima*, and 214 *Polyborus plancus*, and none had conspicuous leg or foot injuries. None of 3 *M. chimango*, 2 *M. chimachima*, and 4 *P. plancus* collected had similar injuries.

Caracaras are unique among Falconidae for building their own stick nests. Brown and

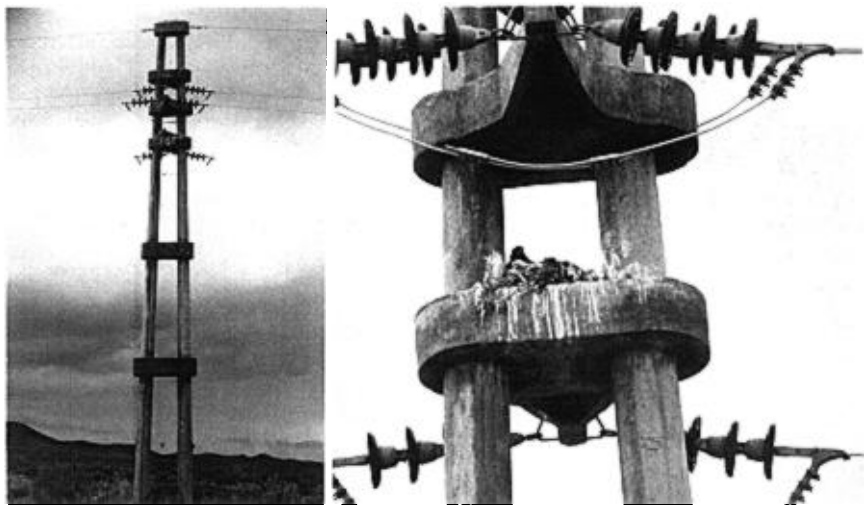


FIG. 1. Left side of the figure shows the cement poles with the nest near the top of the pole. Right side of figure shows a young caracara in the nest.

Amadon (1968) found no instance of caracaras using man-made objects as nest supports, although at least 3 of the 4 species of *Phalcoboenus* do use cliffs in addition to trees and the ground. Five nests of *P. megalopterus* reported by Wolfe (1951) from Chile all were on cliffs with very little nest material (only a few sticks and bits of rubbish). Similarly, Johnson (1965: 265) indicated that all *megalopterus* nests are on cliffs with only "a little dry dung to serve as an apology for a nest." Housse (1938) did not, in fact, find nests, but thought they must nest in trees as some birds ranged down out of the cordilleras into forested country. All of the more than 30 nests of *P. carunculatus* (considered a race of *megalopterus* by Vuilleumier [1970] and Stresemann and Amadon [1979]) studied by DeVries et al. (1983) in Ecuador were on cliffs and seemed to be better constructed than those described above. We could not find references indicating their use of man-made objects for nest placement, but we do not doubt they use them. In the 28 km between Tres Cruces (4200 m elev.) and Abra Pampa, where the road follows a cement high tension power line, we found 2 nests 10 km apart on the cross arms of powerline poles.

The nests were considerably more than a few sticks, bits of dung, and rubbish (both nests were similar in size and construction) (Fig. 1). Sheep or llama wool was also incorporated into the nests. Both nests were substantial, and we suggest that they had been used repeatedly with material added annually. This should, however, also be the case with nests elsewhere on cliffs, and we are unable to explain the differences. The only other species in the puna that could build a nest of similar size are the Red-backed Hawk (*Buteo polysoma*) and the Puna Hawk (*Buteo poecilochrous*), but their nests are very different in structure from those we found.

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