

News, Notes, Comments

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**Last line of ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
should read as follows: Comments and
suggestions by Doug Gill and the reviewer,
Robert Yunick, greatly improved this
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Accumulation of Organic Material on the Talons of American Kestrels

Two American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) were captured in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia with varying degrees of organic material accumulation on their talons and, in one case, the material was also present on the legs and feet. American Kestrels are routinely captured, banded and released in the Shenandoah Valley Raptor Study Area (SVRSA) which comprises approximately 38,300 ha centered roughly on Timberville, VA. Since the establishment of the SVRSA in 2008, we have been intensively studying kestrels year-round, both wintering birds and kestrels nesting in the 50 nest boxes within the study area. Over the past seven years, we have captured, banded and released 144 adult American Kestrels in the SVRSA and have captured only two (1.39%) kestrels (described below) with accumulations of materials on talons. We suspect these accumulations are organic material derived from the consumption of prey items coupled with inadequate postprandial cleaning behavior.

On 21 Mar 2014 a male kestrel was observed perched next to a female kestrel near a nest box within the SVRSA. Upon capturing the male kestrel utilizing a bal-chatri (Berger and Muelle 1959) with a mouse as a lure, we observed the talons on his medial toes (digit 2) bilaterally were completely encapsulated with what appeared to be organic material forming balls on the talons (see Fig. 1). The tips of the two encased talons were not visibly protruding from these balls. The accumulation of material was dark brown and had a roughly

spherical shape. It was so hard that we could not dent it with our fingernails. The hardened spheres had a smooth, almost polished, appearance. We removed the larger ball (approximately 14 mm by 11 mm) by crushing it with banding pliers causing it to fracture into several small pieces. The smaller ball (11 mm by 8 mm) we were able to slide off the other talon intact. This kestrel otherwise appeared to be in good health.



Fig. 1. Hard organic balls encasing talons of male kestrel.

The second kestrel with accumulations of organic material on the talons, legs and feet was an adult female captured on 17 May 2014 in a nest box containing her young. This falcon had what appeared to be an accumulation of organic material on all eight of her talons extending onto the distal most tips of her digits and plantar aspect of both feet (digital pads). (see Fig. 2). An abnormal accumulation of the brown material was also noted on the dorsal aspect of tarsometatarsus extending proximally along the dorsal tibiotarsal scales. The material that had accumulated on this falcon encompassed more surface area of the falcon's foot than the previously captured male kestrel, but consisted of softer, less dense material and the tips of her talons were still exposed. While defending herself during capture, she was able to place all eight talon tips into the skin of her captor. The nest