

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

A Cooperative Gull Hunt by Bald Eagle: The Bald Eagle is known to have a varied diet. Fish, waterfowl and deer carcasses are probably among the most usual winter foods in Sullivan County, New York. Gulls may also be taken as described by Delehanty (*Kingbird* 40:19). Cooperation between two eagles in the capture of any flying prey, however, is apparently uncommon. I here describe the cooperative capture of a gull, probably a Herring Gull. On 15 January 1994, my son, Daniel, and I drove to the Rondout Reservoir to look for Bald Eagles. It was about 10:00 AM when we arrived at the west end of Route 55A. It was windy and very cold. We first watched gulls flying near the powerhouse. We got out of the car to look east towards the main body of the reservoir and immediately saw two mature eagles within 100 yards of us, flying about 20-40 yards above the snow and water. An immature gull was flying between the eagles and we realized that the gull was trapped. Each time it shifted directions, one eagle would change course as if to prevent its escape. After several attempts to snatch the gull, one of the eagles caught it with a talon and pulled its prey to the snow. We had watched the chase for only 30-40 seconds. It appeared to be a cooperative effort, until the meal started. The eagle that killed the gull stood protectively on its prey. The second bird watched for 3-4 minutes and flew off towards the forest. In an extended discussion of hunting techniques, only two cases of cooperative hunting by Bald Eagle (on Snow Geese and rabbits) are described in *The Bald Eagle* by J. M. Gerrard and G. R. Bortolotti (1988). Ellis, Bednarz, Smith and Flemming (*Bioscience* 43,1993) propose that cooperation between raptors may only appear during periods of food deprivation. This may have been the case, since the severe winter limited open water and access to fish and waterfowl.

Thanks to Valerie Freer of Sullivan County Community College for her suggestions on this note.

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