

Live Prey in Buteo Nests

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Raptorial birds (hawks and owls) are usually predatory throughout their annual life cycles. During the nestling phase of the breeding season the male of the species typically brings dead prey to the nest, which the female then feeds to the nestlings (Newton 1979). Live prey have been recorded as being brought to raptor nests on rare occasions (Gossett and Smith 1993, Spofford and Amadon 1993.) Herein, I report two more instances of live prey at nests.

Live prey have been recorded previously at Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) nests (Matray 1974) but not at Red-shouldered Hawk (*B. lineatus*) nests. I observed an Eastern garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) being brought to a Broad-wing nest on 16 Jun 1979. I climbed the nest immediately after the snake was delivered and found the snake belly-up in the nest. When I attempted to pick it up, it turned over and slithered out of the nest and fell to the ground. This nest contained 3 young aged 10, 10 and 8 days. Both parents were in adult plumage.

On 18 May 1979, I visited a Red-shouldered Hawk nest. Upon climbing the nest, I found one egg and a nestling approximately 7 days old. The adult present at the nest site, circled and called and occasionally made close passes at me (presumably the female based on behavior; Crocoll 1994). Shortly after I climbed to the nest, the other parent (presumably the male) arrived at the nest carrying an Eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*). The adult did not notice my presence until it landed on the nest with its prey. It promptly jumped off the nest and flew away. The live chipmunk left the nest, scurried down the tree and disappeared into the brush. I did not record the ages of the Red-shouldered Hawk parents.

Live prey at these nests was rare (RSHK - 7% visits to 3 nests, n=14; BWHK - 0.006% visits to 14 nests, n=170) and I concur with Spofford and Amadon (1993) that it probably is an incidental occurrence. However, it is interesting to note that at least with the Broad-winged Hawk that an adult-plumaged bird brought the prey so that it was not necessarily an inexperienced hunter bringing food to the nest. Also, the data presented both here (the Red-shouldered Hawk nest) and by Matray (1974), at Broad-winged Hawk nests, suggest that males may be the more likely sex to bring live prey. This deserves further observations to corroborate.

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