

**Attempted predation of a Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)
by a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)**

Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) are a widespread raptor species now enigmatic of cities and urban areas. In New York City, NY, USA, there are at least 25 pairs breeding within the city limits as of 2019, and many that migrate through and over-winter in the area. Peregrines typically feed on small prey items

such as Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*) in urban environments (Drewitt and Dixon 2008), though they are known to sometimes attempt to take prey that are significantly larger than them in size (White *et al.* 2002). Given their recent widespread increases in abundance, understanding the role they play in predation of other potentially sensitive species is of management importance. Here, I report an instance of attempted predation of a Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) by a Peregrine Falcon in the vicinity of a regionally-important breeding population of herons and other colonial waterbirds in New York City.

At 1850 hrs. on 31 July 2018, I observed a Peregrine Falcon hunting along the mudflats on the eastern shoreline of Great Kills Park, Staten Island, New York (40°32'54"-74°07'24"). The falcon flushed several hundred birds including American Oystercatchers (*Haematopus palliatus*), Semipalmated Sandpipers (*Calidris pusilla*), and a single adult Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*). Rather than pursue the smaller potential prey items, the falcon immediately made several passes at the Little Blue Heron which was flying southeast over the bay. The heron was knocked into the water by the falcon, which dove at it, missed, then circled back around. The heron was able to fly off of the surface of the water, but was again knocked back in by the falcon, which then attempted to lift the heron with its talons. While the heron was still struggling in the water, two Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) began to mob the Peregrine, which let go of the heron and was driven off. The heron then flew south toward Hoffman Island, one of the main heronries in the Lower New York Bay. The entire encounter lasted approximately one minute, and was photo-documented.

Peregrine Falcons have been known to attempt to take prey items that are larger than them. However, herons are rarely preyed upon, and thus have poorly developed anti-predator adaptations (Milstein *et al.* 1970, Kushlan 1981). Throughout the New York Harbor and Jamaica Bay, there are large rookeries with regionally-significant populations of wading birds. Although predation by Peregrine Falcons is not regularly reported from those islands, it is possible that they may exert some pressure on the birds nesting there. Peregrine Falcons have increased substantially within the New York City area since protections were enacted at the federal and state levels. As their populations continue to increase in the region, understanding how predation by Peregrines, other avian predators, and mammals play into regional trends in colonial waterbirds should be a focus of research efforts.

LITERATURE CITED

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