

UNUSUAL PREY OF SHARP-SHINNED (*ACCIPITER STRIATUS*) AND COOPER'S (*A. COOPERII*) HAWKS IN FLORIDA

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On 21 February 1999, McNair watched an adult Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), presumably a female based on its large size, kill a first-year female Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) at Apalachicola, Franklin County, Florida. The hawk approached low over river marshes alongside Scipio Creek which was 100 ft wide (30.5 m) and flushed a flock of ca. 600 Lesser Scaup (first-year and adult birds of both sexes) which were feeding and resting on the water. The hawk pursued a scaup which had separated from the flock. This scaup flew over the marsh which separated Scipio Creek from the broad Apalachicola River toward which the scaup was heading. The Sharp-shinned Hawk, however, turned abruptly and quickly rose above the scaup, forcing the scaup to turn about 90 degrees and veer downward toward the marsh. The hawk quickly descended over the back of the scaup, grasped its neck and base of the head with its talons, and with a mutual flurry of wings, the hawk landed on the ground in the marsh with the scaup underneath it. The Sharp-shinned Hawk remained at the site for at least 15 min but feeding was not observed because marsh grass hid the birds from view.

The mean mass of female Sharp-shinned Hawks is 174-179 g (Palmer 1988), ca. 25% of the mean mass of first-year Lesser Scaups (647-761 g) (Austin et al. 1998). This is by far the heaviest prey killed by Sharp-shinned Hawks that has been adequately documented (Bent 1937, Sherrod 1978, Palmer 1988). Sharp-shinned Hawks regularly kill birds as large as adult Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) (range of mean mass in United States: 162-233 g; Brennan 1999) and Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*) (mean mass: ca. 173 g; Brown et al. 1998). They usually carry quail to plucking perches to eat (Bent 1937, Palmer 1988). Sharp-shinned Hawks may also kill other Sharp-shinned Hawks (Palmer 1988), and possibly, birds as heavy as adult Rock Doves (*Columba livia*) (mean mass: 347 g; Johnston 1992). Sharp-shinned Hawks have attacked species as large as Pileated Woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*) (mass range: 229-325 g; Bull and Jackson 1995), but without killing them (Bent 1937, Palmer 1988). A Sharp-shinned Hawk once knocked down to the ground a full-grown Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) (mass range: 727-1014 g; Davis 1993) flying across a marsh, possibly with the intent of eating it but without killing it (Bent 1937, Palmer 1988).

On 30 January 1999 at 0800 hr, Lewis watched an immature Cooper's Hawk (*A. cooperii*) attempt to catch a mullet (*Mugil sp.*) at Indian Pass, Franklin County, Florida. The hawk was first noted diving toward the water near the refuge boathouse on St. Vincent Island. It then hit the water with outstretched talons 15 ft (4.6 m) from the shoreline. The hawk emerged from the 20 cm deep water with a 25 cm long mullet in its

talons which it lifted two ft (0.6 m) above the water before dropping the fish. The Cooper's Hawk circled the site several times before disappearing over the forested ridge of St. Vincent Island. The mullet was apparently not severely injured for no sign of it was apparent when Lewis checked the site within 10 sec of the attack. The estimated mass of the mullet was 285 g, based on the mass of mullets of similar length in local fish markets.

Fish are a rare item in the diet of Cooper's Hawk (Rosenfield 1988). The single documented successful capture of fish by Cooper's Hawk occurred in Arkansas during a drought where one bird on several occasions fed on minnows in a desiccating pool (Bent 1937, Rosenfield 1988). Sharp-shinned Hawks are not documented to have included fish in their diet (Sherrod 1978, Palmer 1988).

In summary, this note documents the capacity of *Accipiter* hawks to opportunistically capture (Sharp-shinned Hawk), or attempt to capture (Cooper's Hawk), unusual prey.

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