

LETTERS

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GULLS (*LARUS* SPP.) IN THE DIET OF FERRUGINOUS HAWKS

Ferruginous hawks (*Buteo regalis*) eat various types of prey, but in most areas rely heavily on just a few species such as jackrabbits (*Lepus* spp.), ground squirrels (*Spermophilus* spp.), pocket gophers (*Thomomys* spp.), and prairie dogs (*Cynomys* spp.) [M. J. Bechard and J. K. Schmutz 1995, *The Birds of North America*, No. 172, A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.]. Twenty studies examining the dietary habits of ferruginous hawks have identified 6,203 prey items [R. R. Olendorff 1993, U. S. Dept. Inter., Bur. of Land Manage., Boise, ID.]. Mammals comprise 95.3% of the prey taken by biomass (83.3% by frequency) and passerines and other birds comprise only 4.1% of the overall diet by biomass (13.2% by frequency). Shorebirds are taken infrequently and account for only approximately 0.09% of the overall diet by biomass (0.08% by frequency). Gulls (*Larus* spp.) have never been reported in the diet of ferruginous hawks, despite the fact that they are a common species that occurs throughout much of the hawk's breeding range. Herein, we document the occurrence of both California (*Larus californicus*) and ring-billed (*Larus delawarensis*) gulls in the diet of ferruginous hawks in Washington state during the breeding season.

In 1994 and 1995, we collected pellets from occupied ferruginous hawk nest sites on and adjacent to the U. S. Department of Energy's Hanford Site in southcentral Washington (Benton County). While collecting pellets, we observed piles of gull remains at 3 nest sites. At one site, remains from at least eight gulls were found in 1994, and numerous piles were again found at the same nest in 1995. Piles were scattered on the ground up to 50 m from the nest. Pellets collected at this nest contained mandibles, feet, and feathers from gulls verifying that the ferruginous hawks, and not some other mammalian predator, were indeed eating both species of gulls. Remains were mainly those of juvenile birds.

At a second nest site, remains from at least 3 gulls were found scattered near the nest in 1994. Again, evidence in pellets verified that the gulls had been eaten by the ferruginous hawks. We did not return to collect pellets at this nest in 1995. At a third nest in 1995, a gull wing was seen hanging from the edge of the nest during the nesting period. After the young had fledged, we returned and found several piles of gull remains scattered near the base of the nest structure.

Gulls were common in the study area during spring and summer months and were frequently observed in large groups foraging on crickets. There were also several breeding colonies in the study area. Under conditions such as these, it appears that gulls can provide an alternative food source for ferruginous hawks that has not been previously reported.

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STOMACH CONTENTS OF A SWAINSON'S HAWK FROM ARGENTINA

The Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) is known to feed on a wide array of prey including mammals, birds, reptiles and insects (J.C. Bednarz 1988. *Condor* 90:311–323; J.K. Schmutz et al. 1980. *Can. J. Zool.* 58:1075–1089). In Argentina,