

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

ORNITHOLOGIA NEOTROPICAL 2: 37, 1991
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PREDATION ON NESTLING BARE-THROATED TIGER-HERONS BY A GREAT BLACK-HAWK

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Key words: Predation, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, *Tigrisoma mexicanum*, Great Black-Hawk, *Buteogallus urubitinga*

Little is known about the diet or hunting strategies of Great Black-Hawks (*Buteogallus urubitinga*), a widely distributed but poorly known species in Central and South America. In Panama, Wetmore (Wetmore 1965, p. 231) reported that frogs form a principal food source, and that lizards, particularly basilisks (*Basiliscus*), also are eaten. In El Salvador Dickey and van Rossem (Dickey & van Rossem 1938) reported finding a grebe, an Inca Dove (*Scardafella inca*), and an unknown small mammal consumed by Great Black-Hawks. The following account of predation by a Great Black-Hawk on nestling Bare-throated Tiger-Herons (*Tigrisoma mexicanum*) in Costa Rica is one of the first specific reports of predation by this hawk.

We observed an adult Bare-throated Tiger-Heron sitting on a bulky stick nest roughly 15 m above the ground in a large kapok tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) on 15 July 1988. The nest was located about midway along one of the lowest large, horizontal branches of the tree. No other nests were visible in the tree. We saw a single adult heron on the nest each successive day through 20 July.

As we approached the area on 21 July at 6:00 a.m. we observed a young adult Great Black-Hawk standing on the edge of the nest and feeding. One adult tiger-heron was present also and stood on the same branch three to four meters closer to the trunk. The heron was perched obliquely both to the branch and the hawk, perhaps allowing it to observe the hawk, while also allowing it a ready escape. The tiger-heron repeated the characteristic low "barking, froglike call" (Wetmore 1965, p. 105) every 20 to 30 seconds. The hawk bent over on several occasions and used its bill to tear away chunks of food, which it swallowed. The hawk seemed to pay little attention to the heron.

We interpret this observation as an act of predation by the Great Black-Hawk upon nestling Bare-throated Tiger-Herons. It seems likely that the hawk was feeding upon nestling herons rather than eggs because we clearly observed it using its bill to tear food prior to swallowing.

These observations took place approximately 0.5 km east of the administrative buildings of the Refugio Nacional de Fauna Silvestre Dr. Rafael Lucas Rodriguez Caballero (commonly known as Palo Verde) in the Pacific lowlands of north-western Costa Rica. Palo Verde is a wildlife refuge located approximately 2 km S and 12 km E of Bagaces in Guanacaste Province (10° 30' N/ 85° 20' W; elevation 10 m).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Sr. Guillermo Canessa Mora of El Departamento de Vida Silvestre and Sr. Fernando Cortes of Servicio de Parques Nacionales of Costa Rica for making our work at Palo Verde possible. We thank the Organization for Tropical Studies for providing logistic and financial support, and William S. Alverson and Bette A. Loiselle for assistance with logistics. Lewis was supported by financial assistance from the College of Biological Sciences and Department of Ecology and Behavioral Biology, University of Minnesota.

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Accepted 10 January 1990.