

ATTEMPTED KLEPTOPARASITISM OF A WHITE-TAILED KITE BY A PEREGRINE FALCON

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Kleptoparasitism, the intraspecific and interspecific stealing of food already procured, is an opportunistic method of foraging used by many species of birds (Brockmann and Barnard 1979). The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is known to kleptoparasitize a variety of bird species, including large gulls (*Larus* spp.), the Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*), Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*), Bonelli's Eagle (*Aquila fasciata*), Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*), Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*), Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*), and Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) (Bent 1937, Meinertzhagen 1959, Dekker 1980, 1999, 2003, Longrigg 1981, Zubergoitia et al 2002, Moshkin 2009, White et al. 2002, 2013). In this note we report the first documented incident of a Peregrine Falcon attempting to kleptoparasitize a White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*).



Figure 1. Attempted kleptoparasitism of a White-tailed Kite by an immature Peregrine Falcon near Lakeport, California, on 31 January 2014. Three photos illustrate the falcon approaching (A), the kite pivoting upward toward the falcon (B), and the falcon flying away (C).

Photos by Faith Rigolosi

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Around midday on 31 January 2014, Rigolosi was photographing two White-tailed Kites foraging in an orchard about 4 km southeast of Lakeport, Lake County, California (39° 00' 42" N, 122° 53' 34"). When she observed one flying with a small rodent, probably a California Vole (*Microtus californicus*), she began taking photographs. An immature Peregrine Falcon suddenly appeared and approached within 1 m of the kite (Figure 1a). In response, the kite hovered while facing the falcon and presented its talons and its prey toward the falcon (Figure 1b). The falcon instantly broke off its attack by flying above the kite (Figure 1c) and flew away. Afterward the kite flew away with its prey toward the area where the second White-tailed Kite was last seen.

Interspecific kleptoparasitism by the Peregrine Falcon is an opportunistic and seldom used foraging strategy. For example, Dekker (1980, 2003) recorded it in only six of 958 (0.6%) observations of foraging in Alberta and four of 652 (0.6%) observations in British Columbia. Given a previous report of a Peregrine Falcon successfully kleptoparasitizing a Black-winged Kite in Africa (Longrigg 1981), it is not surprising that a falcon would attempt to kleptoparasitize the congeneric White-tailed Kite.

Although the White-tailed Kite often attacks and is often attacked by other species of raptors, it is rarely kleptoparasitized. Of 37 successful prey captures by the White-tailed Kite observed by Stendell (1972), only one (3%) resulted in kleptoparasitism (by a Northern Harrier). Bammann (1975) did not report any incidents of kleptoparasitism during 586 interspecific interactions between White-tailed Kites and other raptors, which included only one interaction with a Peregrine Falcon, but he could not determine whether the kite attacked the falcon or vice versa. Warner and Rudd (1975) did not report any incidents of kleptoparasitism during 67 prey captures by the White-tailed Kite. Mohan (2004) observed 757 hunting flights by White-tailed Kites resulting in 195 captures; of the 757 it was victimized during <1% (no further details, including the kleptoparasitizing species, were reported). However, two species of raptors, the Aplomado Falcon (*Falco femoralis*) and Chimango Caracara (*Milvago chimango*), and one corvid, the American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), have been reported to kleptoparasitize the White-tailed Kite (Dixon et al. 1957, Heredia and Clark 1984, Brown et al. 2003, Baladrón and Pretelli 2013). The rarity of the White-tailed Kite being a target of kleptoparasitism and our observation of the Peregrine Falcon's failing in its attempt suggest that the kite is tenacious in defending captured prey, rendering it a relatively unprofitable, seldom targeted host for potential kleptoparasites.

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