

Notes

Greylag Geese nesting on castle in close proximity to Peregrine Falcons

On 8th April 2010, PT found two Greylag Goose *Anser anser* nests on a ruined castle in Co. Cork. Greylags are typically ground-nesters but there are documented cases of (single) Greylag nests in trees (e.g. Redfern 2002, Coath, 2006); to our knowledge, however, this is the first documented record of Greylag Geese nesting on a building. The nests were situated on top of the south-facing, 1-m-wide castle wall, some 10 m above ground level. The two Greylag nests, containing three and five eggs, were situated only 2 m and 5 m respectively from an active Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* nest. The Peregrines laid four eggs, from which two juveniles fledged by 30th July. No Greylag Geese were known to have fledged from the two castle nests.

Five pairs of Greylag Geese nested each year between 2005 and 2008 on a fen just

100 m from the castle, but none bred in 2009, just one pair bred in 2010, but their nest was predated. In addition, a Greylag nest was found on another derelict castle, less than 6 km away, in 2009 (J. Humphries pers. comm.). By nesting on a building, the geese may be better equipped to avoid ground predators in the area such as Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* or American Mink *Mustela vison*. Alternatively, the proximity to the Peregrine nest may suggest that there is a benefit to coexistence – the Peregrines would presumably have helped to ward off at least potential nest predators such as corvids or gulls.

References

- Coath, M. 2006. Greylag Goose nesting in pine tree. *Brit. Birds* 99: 365.
Redfern, R. 2002. Greylag Goose nesting in oak tree. *Brit. Birds* 95: 189.

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The impact of a freak storm on Honey-buzzard migration

In early May 2010, I was on the French Mediterranean coast at St Pierre La Mer, south of Narbonne, when the area was subject to a freak storm, with northerly winds of up to 120 kph that brought widespread devastation. On 6th May, on a hill overlooking the Chateau Camplazens in the relatively low-lying Massif de la Clape (peaking at just over 200 m), the wind had backed northwesterly and I began to observe migrant Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* coming from the west, predominantly using an active, flapping flight. With the following wind still strong, these raptors were keeping close to the ground (c. 5–15 m) rising over the ridges and dropping into valleys. I counted 100 during 11.00–12.00 hrs, in small groups of up to ten; after 12.00, the hourly rate increased to c. 300 per hour, in groups of up to 30, and this was maintained until

14.30, when I had to leave. The numbers of birds seen were nearly three times higher than the mean hourly count for the area in the previous year (www.migration.net).

Honey-buzzards typically migrate by soaring, yet can negotiate wide stretches of water better than broader-winged *Buteo* species (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). They may also migrate using flapping flight in the early part of the day, before thermals rise, and these observations demonstrate their ability to switch to a more energy-intensive flight when conditions dictate.

Acknowledgments

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Reference

- Ferguson-Lees, J., & Christie, D.A. 2001. *Raptors of the World*. Helm, London.

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Large flock of Alpine Swifts roosting in a cave

On 13th September 2009 at Monte Cofano, in western Sicily, a large flock of Alpine Swifts *Apus melba* was observed, high in the sky, about an hour before sunset. Over a ten-minute period the flock gradually descended, calling loudly, until eventually they were seen against the backdrop of the area's limestone cliffs. At this point the flock was estimated to be of 3,000–4,000 birds. As the first Alpine Swifts approached the cliff face, they began entering one of the large caves set in the cliff. Over the next 30 minutes the entire flock went to roost in holes in the cliff, some

entering the large cave, others the many smaller holes that pockmark the cliff face. In the final minutes before sunset the last bird went to roost and all calling ceased. This sighting represents the largest communal roost of Alpine Swifts recorded in Italy, and is probably the only occasion that birds have been recorded entering a cave to roost (Brichetti & Fracasso 2007).

Reference

Brichetti, P., & Fracasso, G. 2007. *Ornitologia Italiana*. Vol. 4. Alberto Perdisa Editore, Bologna.

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Jackdaws mobbing Mute Swan

At around 14.15 hrs on 6th November 2010, I was in my garden in Clifton, Bedfordshire, when I was alerted by the sound of Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* wings and a cacophony of Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* calls. Looking up, I observed a single Mute Swan flying low over the row of gardens in our close, away and eventually out of my field of view. Over a distance of c. 400 m it was constantly mobbed by some 35 Jackdaws. They seemed to be clearly disturbing the swan, which was keeping low and trying its best to take evasive action. I have, of course, seen corvids mob raptors in this way on many occasions but

have never witnessed such behaviour in relation to a swan. Former *BB* editor Tim Sharrock told me: 'No, I've never seen such behaviour, but it doesn't surprise me. At this time of year, groups of Jackdaws set off on excursions, apparently just for fun, muck about in strong winds and generally behave like naughty teenagers. Harassing a Mute Swan sounds like good sport, a bit like tripping someone up or putting a firework in a pillar box!' A note on Jackdaws and Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* mobbing a Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* has appeared previously in *BB* (*Brit. Birds* 66: 168).

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Birds eating unripe fruits

On 3rd September 2010, at West Bagborough, Somerset, I saw a Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* pulling at the unripe fruits of Guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus*, swallowing those it was able to detach. Snow & Snow (1988) stated that Guelder-rose berries generally remain unavailable to birds until they ripen, usually by late November.

Also in September 2010, I watched on several occasions a Robin *Erithacus rubecula* eating the unripe fruits of Spindle *Euonymus*

europaeus in my garden. Again, although Snow & Snow (1988) stated that Robins commonly eat Spindle fruits, it is normally from November onwards, when the fruits are ripe. There was no evidence of premature ripening in this case, nor an obvious shortage of natural food in the area.

Reference

Snow, B., & Snow, D. 1988. *Birds and Berries*. Poyser, Calton.

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