

## LITERATURE CITED

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### **Rat Snake Preys on Nestlings of Rough-winged Swallow and Common Grackle**

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Though snake predation of various swallow species and other birds is not unknown (Bent 1942, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 179:424-433; Condor 79:509; Living Bird 15:33-41; Murrelet 61:35-36; Wilson Bull. 91:135-137), few snake predation records have been noted from North Carolina.

At 1830 on 14 May 1980 in Bertie County, N.C., I examined a hole that was horizontally elliptical and was dug out of a sandy clay bank that had a slope of approximately 50 degrees. The hole was approximately 55 cm from the top of the bank and 2.5 m from the base. With the help of a pine root, I pulled myself up to the entrance, which had a vertical measurement of 5.5 cm and a horizontal measurement of 12.5 cm. The depth of the hole was 67 cm. A nest of pine needles was barely visible, but the hole was too dark for me to see eggs or young. Because adult Rough-winged Swallows (*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*) were seen entering the hole, I assumed that the hole was being used for nesting.

At 1900 on 16 May, I returned to the nest hole and with the aid of a flashlight I found a Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoletta*) curled up in it. After considerable effort, I extracted from the hole a snake approximately 120 cm in length. Its sides were evidently swollen. With firm downward massaging along its vertically held body, I forced the snake to regurgitate its stomach contents. The stomach remains were recognizable: five Rough-winged Swallow nestlings, one Rough-winged Swallow egg and two Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) nestlings. The Rough-winged Swallow nestlings had a trace of down on the back and head and measured between 35 mm and 40 mm in length. The Rough-winged Swallow egg measured 17 x 11 mm and was cracked along its length and width. No visible signs of digestion were seen on the Rough-winged Swallow nestlings or egg. The Common Grackle nestlings measured approximately 108 mm in length and emerging feather sheaths could be seen along the feather tracts. The abdomen of one grackle nestling appeared to be slightly digested, for some of its internal organs were exposed. The eyes of all seven nestlings were still unopened.

Identification of the snake's stomach contents was confirmed by David Lee of the North Carolina State Museum. The snake was released near the point of capture.