

vation in Pender County, might be an escapee from either a falconer or an aviary. However, we did not observe a falconer's jesses on the bird's tarsi, nor are we aware of any aviaries in the surrounding area whose collections include large raptors, although either a falconer or an aviary might be operating without notice.

Based on Knight's (1990) analysis, March is among the months when relatively few Northern Goshawks are observed in North Carolina and Tennessee (i.e., 9 of 92 records). We trust our observation of a Northern Goshawk in the coastal plain of North Carolina may help unravel the species' uncertain status in North Carolina (see Potter et al. 1980). At present, the Northern Goshawk is not included in the checklist of the Lower Cape Fear Bird Club.

We thank J. F. Parnell for calling our attention to the sighting at Fort Fisher. Parnell, H. C. Mueller, and R. L. Knight kindly reviewed a previous draft of our manuscript.

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Wasps as Scavengers on Dead Bird

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About 1630 h EDT on 1 October 1968, I found a dead Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*) lying on its back on the ground beneath a large window to the living room of my home near Zebulon, Wake County, North Carolina. Nearly all the feathers and most of the flesh had been removed from its breast, but the remaining plumage was undisturbed. The missing feathers lay in a neat, V-shaped pile with the point of the V about 7.5 cm from the head of the bird. Two small wasps commonly called "yellow jackets" (*Vespula* sp.) were feeding on the carcass, burrowed deep inside with only the tips of their abdomens protruding on each side of the sternum. The wasps diligently guarded their prey from several species of flies and the human intruder. Using a 7 X 50 binocular from about 4 m away, I saw one wasp remove a feather and deposit it at the point of the V-shaped pile. Apparently air currents created by the wings of the wasps had caused the feathers to become distributed in a V instead of in a

circular mound. For a period of about 3 hours between 1630 h and sunset, from one to five yellow jackets fed constantly on the carcass.

The morning of 2 October the wasps were again feeding on the dead thrush, but the pile of feathers had become scattered. About 0830 h, a Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) discovered the bird and proceeded to tear it apart to obtain food from the wings, head, and belly. Following the squirrel as it carried the prey several feet away, the wasps repeatedly attempted to continue feeding on the bird, but they apparently did not sting their competitor. After the squirrel abandoned the carcass, the yellow jackets removed shreds of flesh from the bones and feathers until sometime in the afternoon of 2 October.

Vespine species are known to prey on flies, honeybees, and other insects and also to "carve pieces from fruit and dead vertebrates" (Edward O. Wilson, *The Insect Societies*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1976, p. 20-21). Gilbert S. Grant (pers. comm.) reports that yellow jackets regularly pick flesh from the waste when he cleans fish outdoors and that he has seen as many as 20 to 30 yellow jackets feeding on the brain of a slaughtered sheep. Yellow jackets' taste for meat will not surprise any picnicker who has unwillingly shared a ham sandwich with them.

Although yellow jackets are well known as scavengers, I have found no reports, published or otherwise, of their plucking feathers from dead birds, nor have I seen that behavior again during the 24 years that have elapsed since my 1968 observation. The wasps' role in the process of decomposition is undoubtedly obscured by subsequent feeding by other species. Had I seen only the activity following the arrival of the squirrel, I certainly would have viewed the mammal as the primary scavenger and would have been totally unaware that the yellow jackets had plucked feathers from the breast of the dead Swainson's Thrush before feeding on its carcass.

Opportunistic Foraging on Swarming Ants by Gulls, Shorebirds, and Grackles

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Gulls are opportunistic omnivores, which feed on a variety of fish (live and dead), garbage, berries, rodents, bird eggs, and insects (Bent 1963). Seymour (1972) observed three species of gulls hawking ants, and Harlow (1971) and Baird and Meyerriicks (1965) observed many species, primarily passerines, feeding on swarming ants. Lee and Clark (1981) reported on Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) feeding on insects over land on Bodie and Pea Islands, North Carolina. In this note I describe an episode of aerial feeding on swarming ants by gulls and feeding on grounded ants by gulls, shorebirds, and grackles.

Between 1500 and 1600 h on 14 November 1988 I observed 12-15 Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) soaring in a thermal above my yard in Sneads Ferry, Onslow County, North Carolina. Upon closer inspection with binoculars,