

SHORT NOTE

Insect hawking by a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) in Fiji

Many species of small falcon are known to frequent grass fires to catch flying insects flushed by the fires. This behaviour is particularly conspicuous in Africa (Brown *et al.* 1982). The normal food of these small falcon species, however, is largely insects under normal circumstances (see, for example, Rudebeck 1963). The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), on the other hand, has evolved to feed on birds. Generally 90-95% or more of their diets consists of birds, the rest usually consisting of mammals such as bats and rodents. Populations or individuals may vary, some even approaching a 99% bird diet, others having as few as 60-70% (by number) of birds in the diet. Insects or other invertebrates seem to be rare in Peregrine diets (cf. Cade 1982). One of us (CMW) has seen an immature male Peregrine catch a dragonfly (Odonata) on the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico during the falcons' autumn migration. In one Australian eyrie scores of cicada (Homoptera) remains were found, and grasshoppers (Orthoptera) have been reported as food in Australia (K. C. Norris & H. Olney, pers. comm.; Pruett-Jones *et al.* 1981).

On 26 September 1989 between Yolovou and Nawairambe villages in the Sigatoka Valley on Vitilevu, Fiji, we watched a Peregrine repeatedly take flying locusts (Orthoptera, possibly the genus *Austacris*) that were about 6 cm in body length. Previously, birds, mammals, and reptiles have been found as food in eyries of Peregrines on Fiji (White *et al.* 1988 and references therein). The falcon was about 8 km from a known Peregrine Falcon eyrie that we were investigating, but we did not believe it to be associated with that eyrie. A large grass fire covering perhaps 12 ha was burning on a hillside and the fire was being pushed up the grassy hillside by a rather constant 10 knot wind. Eight to 10 White-breasted Woodswallows (*Artamus leucorhynchus*) were at the edge of the fire catching insects (apparently mainly locusts) flushed by the fire, occasionally dashing into the smoke to catch something. Quite unexpectedly a yearling male Peregrine stooped between woodswallows and caught something in the air. Initially, we thought the falcon had tried to catch a woodswallow and had simply missed it, but we soon realised that it was catching airborne locusts, which it then ate on the wing. The falcon caught at least 11 locusts in just under 8 minutes before it soared and drifted slowly up the valley and out of sight. During one stoop three woodswallows started mobbing the falcon, but then they stopped to continue hawking insects.

LITERATURE CITED

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