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ON THE NIDIFICATION OF THE CUBAN SHARP-SHINNED HAWK, *Accipiter striatus fringilloides*

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The Cuban subspecies of the Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus fringilloides* is, together with the Cuban Kite *Chondro-hierax (uncinatus) wilsonii*, the least studied raptor of our acchipelago. On the reproduction of this race there existed reports of only two nests together with one egg, apparently of the subspecies *fringilloides*, collected in a dead palm tree (Garrido 1967), which to date have been found to be valid (Balat & Gonzalez 1982); Valdes 1984; Wotzkow 1985). However, these reports were based on personal communications, and the nests lacked the metric and structural information, as well as any other data, which would allow them to be unmistakeably confirmed as belonging to *A. s. fringilloides*.

The first nest, located in the vicinity of Topes de Collantes, Sancti Spiritus province, was reported through Jorge de la Cruz, based on three chicks collected from a palm tree felled on 13th June, 1965. Jorge de la Cruz himself kept one of the chicks in captivity, but now states that he never saw the nest itself. The second nest, located near Sagua La Grande, Villa Clara province, was reported by Pedro Saavedra on the 2nd January, 1966, and contained two eggs, one of which broke, while the other remains deposited in the egg collection of J.H. Bauzá, at the Instituto de Ecología y Sistemática (IES) (Drawer 12, Box 13).

These reports are somewhat anomalous for the *A. striatus* species, both for the type of tree selected, and for the situation (in a hole). In 1855 Gundlach collected a female of *A. s. fringilloides* which, judging from its aggressive behaviour, seemed to be defending a breeding territory within a pine forest (Gundlach 1867). Bent (1937) and Harrison (1984) both affirm that *A. s. velox* prefers to nest in conifers. Most of the studies undertaken on the *velox* race contrast with our own data and make them rather improbable (J. Wiley,

pers. comm.). Brown (in Bent 1937) examined over 200 nests, and Bent himself more than 25; the majority of these consisted of a platform or palisade, generally built by the birds themselves. In 1840, Audubon (in Bent 1937) reported "two very unusual nests"; the first "in the well-known 'rock-in cave' on the Ohio River"; and the second "in a hollow prong of a broken branch of a Sycamore". It is evident that Harrison relied upon the numerous preceding observations when he concluded: "rarely nest is in a hollow of tree-trunk or a cliff crevice" (Harrison 1984).

Garrido's supposition that the nest found by Saavedra was incomplete is valid, as *A. s. velox* lays between 4 and 5 eggs (Harrison 1984). However, our Kestrel, *Falco sparverius sparveroides* also lays up to 5 eggs, although its mode is 2, and its average 2.78 eggs/nest (Wotzkow & Cruz 1987).

The measurements of the only egg collected of the presumed *Accipiter* (33.3 x 28.3mm) are 1.1mm less than the average larger diameter, and 0.9mm larger than the average smaller diameter of *F. s. sparveroides,* but fall within the size range analyzed for our Kestrel (Wotzkow & Cruz 1987), but not within the average of *F. s. sparveroides* (35.0 x 29.0mm) or of A. s. velox (38.0 x 30.0mm) (Harrison 1984).

The shape of the egg attributed to the Sharp-shinned Hawk does not differ in general from that of the Cuban Kestrel, with one of its poles slightly conical and the other more rounded. It is well known that eggs exhibit a wide range of variation between individuals as regards their shape but, taking as reference the nomenclature of F.W. Preston (in Harrison 1984), this egg is short-subelliptical (similar to those of *F. s. sparveroides),* and not elliptical (typical of *A. s. velox*).

The markings or spots on the analysed egg, mainly concentrated towards the conical pole, are not natural pigmentations, but an accumulation of blood on its apex. It is well known that eggs exhibit variations in their markings within the same species (Harrison 1984), and even within the same brood (Plate 32 in Bent 1937). The analysis of 12 Kestrel eggs of the Bauzá collection denotes that both the background colour as well as the structural markings do not differ from those attributed to *A. s. fringilloides.*

In view of all of the above, we consider that the brood reported by Garrido (1967) actually belongs to *Falco sparverius sparveroides.* The eggs of the Cuban race of the Sharp-shinned Hawk, *A. s. fringilloides,* are still to be discovered and described.

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Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus,* French Pyrenees, 24 May 1972. Photo: W. Suetens & P. van Groenendael