

PRAIRIE FALCON HARASSES CANADA GOOSE

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On 31 October 1980, while at the Oak Hammock Managed Hunting Area, about 20 miles north of Winnipeg, I observed a Prairie Falcon pursuing a Canada Goose. It was approximately one-half hour after sunrise when I first heard the repeated calling of a single Canada Goose. As the call became louder, I noticed the goose, a medium-sized Canada, flying erratically approximately 50 yards above the ground and heading toward a stubble field. It was at this point that I first noticed the falcon pursuing the goose and actually striking at the bird in the air. As the two birds flew over the stubble field, the goose tried turning and side-slipping as a means of evading the falcon. The falcon remained close to the goose as the latter made two passes around the field before finally landing close to some hay bales 150 yards from me. The falcon landed on a large round bale 30 yards from the goose. For almost 10 minutes the falcon sat on the bale while the agitated goose called continually. Finally the falcon flew from the bale, sailed over the goose and landed on another bale in a far corner of the field, approximately 400 yards away. About 10 minutes later the goose flew in a direction away from the falcon and attempting to land in some hunters' decoys, was subsequently shot.

Twenty minutes after the goose had been shot I again noticed the falcon flying across the field about 3 feet above the ground, heading toward a spot in the field where approximately 250 Mallards

were feeding. When the falcon was within 75 yards of the ducks, they flushed and circled back into the centre of the field. Another hunter shot at the ducks and brought down two of them. As he was walking toward the ducks to pick them up, the falcon swooped down at one of the ducks and only moved away after the hunter repeatedly yelled and waved his arms. At this point I moved behind one of the bales in the field and waved my glove above the bale while hiding behind it. The falcon, noticing movement on the bale, flew toward me. I then pulled my glove down and watched with surprise as the falcon glided slowly above the bale within 20 feet of me. As it noticed me it swooped up and drifted off with the wind and eventually out of sight.

I had a brief look at the dead goose which the falcon had originally been pursuing and estimated its weight at approximately 7-8 pounds. Although the Prairie Falcon has been known to take prey as large as a Sharp-tailed Grouse and Mallard, it prefers much smaller birds and mammals.¹ Attempted predation on a large Canada goose must be extremely rare. Nevertheless, the persistency of the falcon in this case shows how audacious this species can be.

¹BENT, A. C. 1938. Life histories of North American birds of prey. Part two. Dover Reprint, 1961. Dover Publ., Inc., New York.