MOREON THE ROOSTING HABITS O AN URBAN MERLIN

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The illustrated note which I prepared on this subject omitted an observation at variance with the hawk's usual behaviour.1 On 5 January 1986, at 4:03 p.m. a Merlin arrived from the east in hot pursuit of a waxwing which dodged among the spruce of a park (mentioned in the earlier note) and evidently escaped capture, since the hawk was found perched without prey on a spruce branch about 2 m above the ground. It flushed from this well-hidden perch to settle in a nearby deciduous tree, remaining there several minutes until the author left the area. Might it have remained in this spruce to roost, 2 hours before sunset instead of its normally much later entry into the roost?

On 16 September 1986 a Merlin (the same bird?) was first seen by another observer on the roof which had been a routine pre-roosting perch the preceding winter. This particular roosting area was not used between mid-May and mid-September 1986. Between 16 September 1986 and 8 January 1987 the hawk was observed there by two observers on 30 evenings and one morning. During this period it showed some deviations from its previously reported habits. On 19 October at 10 minutes after sunset it made an unsuccessful stoop from a pine 50 m from its usual roost at a Red Squirrel on the ground. It then flew to the TV aerial and 18 minutes later dropped behind the roof and out of view.

During the winter of 1986-1987 the TV aerial was its favorite waiting perch rather than the pre-roosting perches used in the preceding winter. Only on three occasions was it seen to enter the

"double spruce" which had bee regular roosting spot during the vious winter but it may have reaching the spruce from behind building where it was not visible my observation post.

During an attempted morning of vation on 21 December the hawken not seen during the period 29 minutes before sunrise, but or morning of 24 December it was also on the antenna at 18 minutes be sunrise, preening and once stretch wing. At 13 minutes before sunriflew toward the river bank.

A stuffed (or model) small ro dragged across an open space is attacked by an owl perched i vicinity. On 18 December I perfo a similar experiment using a st Red-backed Vole, while the watched from the end of a roof 10 m distant. The bait moved for in a most life-like way up and over the uneven snow for abo minutes, until the line detached. The hawk did not read the maneuver was not repeated casionally one or more magpies ched close to the hawk, pre-roosting phase. They never overt gestures of attack toward the lin but if they perched too cld would fly to another of its tradi pre-roosting perches.

This series of observations she the hawk's arrival in the roosting a 3 minutes after sunset on an overening but 11, 13 and 19 minute sunset on three sunny evenings. was thus some evidence that it a

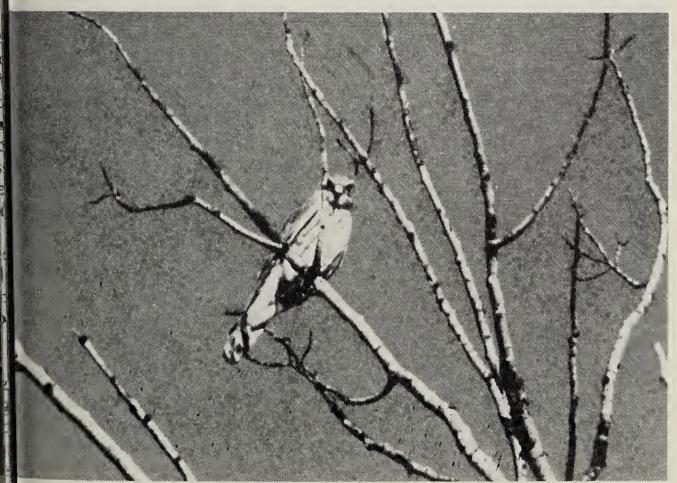
its pre-roosting perch somewhat earron overcast than on sunny evenings.
ne of seven drops to the roost in
ercast weather ranged from 9 to 20
nutes after sunset, with an average of
minutes, while on eight sunny evens the corresponding times ranged
m 10 to 33 minutes with an average
25 minutes, i.e. somewhat earlier on
ercast than on sunny evenings. These
a are contrary to the suggestion in
earlier report that the brightness of
evening sky has a moderate delayeffect on the time (relative to sunset)
entry into the roost.¹

seasonal effect on arrival time is gested by the observation that the lin arrived in the roosting area on eptember 14 minutes before sunset a dull evening, i.e., much earlier the early October to early January es reported above.

aiting periods between arrival in area and entry into the roost in ober were 15 and 10 minutes on

two overcast days, and 8 and 9 minutes on two sunny evenings, i.e. they were longer on overcast than on sunny evenings. The earlier note stated that during the pre-roost wait the hawk spent only a fraction of this time preening. This second series of observations during this phase confirm that during the last part of the waiting period the Merlin was almost always immobile. However, tail movements, rotations of the head 45° o from, and back to resting position, stretching one wing, preening, reaching over the preen gland area with the beak and on mild evenings, fluffing out of the breast plumage, were not infrequent during the earlier part of the waiting periods. Once it defecated immediately before dropping off the perch and, white smears below its traditional perches but hardly any below the roosting tree, showed that defecation was a fairly frequent activity during the pre-roosting period.

¹ HOHN, O. 1986. Roosting habits of an urban Merlin. *Blue Jay* 44(3):194-196.



ture female Richardson's Merlin

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