

FEMALE MERLIN KILLS AMERICAN CROWS IN NEST DEFENCE

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While it is generally acknowledged that Merlins are vigorous defenders of their nests the following noteworthy account of a female killing one and perhaps two American Crows was related to us by Charlie Cowan of Saskatoon.^{1 2 3 5}

These observations were made during the first week of May 1986, at a Merlin nest site in Saskatoon. Cowan was sitting in his garden where the Merlins were nesting when a crow flew past the nest tree. The female immediately left her nest and struck the crow in mid-flight. It fell to the ground and was dead when picked up. Unfortunately the crow was not retained so that the precise cause of death could be determined. However, given its almost instantaneous death, it is likely that she broke its neck. Two days prior to this Cowan had picked up a second dead crow in the garden. Again, it was not examined closely but it is possible that the Merlin was also responsible for its demise.

While Merlins have been seen striking American Crows in nest defence, a previously published account of the attack resulting in the death of the crow was not found.⁴ That it did in this particular instance is quite remarkable, given the considerable size discrepancy between the two species. The average weight of five American Crows in the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History is 427 g and the average weight of 37 female Merlins caught by us breeding in Saskatoon is 256 g.

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¹ BEEBE, F.L. 1974. Field studies of the Falconiformes of British Columbia. Occ. Pap. B.C. Prov. Mus. 17, Victoria.

² BROWN, L.H. and D. AMADON 1968. Eagles, hawks and falcons of the world. McGraw-Hill, N.Y.

³ CRAMP, S. and K.E.L. SIMMONS 1980. The birds of the western Palearctic. Vol. 2, Oxford Univ. Press., Oxford.

⁴ FOX, G.A. 1964. Notes on the western race of the Pigeon hawk. *Blue Jay* 22:140-147.

⁵ FOX, G.A. and T. DONALD 1980. Organochlorine pollutants, nest-defense behavior and reproductive success in Merlins. *Condor* 82:81-84.



Merlin