

to June.<sup>1</sup> The evidence that the lynx was able to lift the entire beaver carcass from time to time also suggests the beaver was not a mature individual.

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## BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES AND WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCHES SCAVENGE A DEER CARCASS

The carcasses of mid-sized to large animals comprise a high quality food resource for both predatory and omnivorous animals, especially during the winter months when few other food resources may be readily available. A number of our local winter birds make significant use of carcasses, including Ravens, which often are among the first animals to arrive at a carcass, and Black-billed Magpies and jays, which do best after carcasses have been opened by other animals. Black-capped Chickadees, White- and Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers might all be expected to scavenge carcasses, based on their use of suet feeders, but there are few well documented observations of their activities in this respect. Here we report carcass scavenging by two of the latter species.

In mid-January 2010, we found a group of three dead White-tailed Deer along the banks of the Assiniboine River just west of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The site had been visited by Coyotes, Red Foxes, and possibly local farm dogs, which had opened the carcasses and consumed about 50% of the muscle mass

of the deer. While we investigated the remains, a mixed flock of Black-capped Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, and a Downy Woodpecker moved into the immediate area. The chickadees showed a particular interest in the deer we were examining, repeatedly approaching it but always turning away just before landing. We stepped back several feet from the carcass to allow the birds more room. Shortly thereafter, a chickadee launched from a small shrub, landed on the exposed femur of the deer, reached under the deer's skin, and pulled off a tiny strip of muscle. After taking a few seconds to consume the small piece of meat, it reached under the deer's skin again, tore off a second piece of muscle and then flew off with the tissue in its beak. We reached for our camera and set up near the deer to try and document this activity.

Over the next 20 minutes, we observed at least five chickadees and two nuthatches repeatedly scavenging small pieces of muscle from the deer carcasses. The accompanying photographs provide documentary proof of this activity: a Black-capped Chickadee lands on a deer carcass (Fig. 1, see inside back cover, top), reaches into it and pulls off a small

strip of muscle tissue, and then emerges with the tissue in its beak (Fig. 2, see inside back cover, bottom). The White-breasted Nuthatches proved too wary to be unambiguously captured in the act of scavenging with the camera equipment we had on hand, ceasing their activity and flying off each time we attempted to close within ~8 m of their position. We did not observe the Downy Woodpecker feeding on the carcasses, but it remained in the immediate vicinity for the entire time we were present, searching the nearby trees where the chickadees and nuthatches were caching pieces of meat and fat.

Black-capped Chickadees have previously been observed scavenging skunk and deer carcasses.<sup>2,3</sup> They are generally thought to prefer fat,<sup>6</sup> but in our observations, muscle was the primary tissue of interest. Among closely related passerines, the Great Tit (*Parus major*) is similarly reported to scavenge carcasses,<sup>4</sup> but also hunts and kills hibernating bats during periods of extreme winter weather.<sup>1</sup> There are a few observations of woodpeckers scavenging carcasses,<sup>4,5</sup> but we found no previous

reports of carcass scavenging by White-breasted Nuthatches.

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## SURVIVAL OF A 'FOSTERED' YOUNG GREAT HORNED OWL

On 10 March 2009, I captured an adult Great Horned Owl in a net near the Edmonton International Airport. The bird was previously banded (no. 788-12210), and I recorded this information as well as an assessment of the bird's condition before releasing it. Later examination of banding records indicated that I had banded this bird as a nestling on 28 May 2002. However, as this was no ordinary nestling, I will share its remarkable story in this note.

Around 5 May 2002, a flightless young owl had been found wandering on the ground in the campground at the Blood Indian Creek Reservoir about 55 mi south of Coronation, Alberta. A search for the

nest by some campers found that it had blown down and no adults or young owls were observed in the area. The owlet, which had no physical injuries other than being somewhat emaciated and very hungry, was cared for and rehabilitated for 2 weeks at the nearby T.K. Ranch (by C. Biggs, a local volunteer). On 19 May 2002, I was contacted by Mrs. Biggs, who informed me that she had an abandoned Great Horned Owl nestling that needed to be returned to the wild. Fostering the young owl in another active nest would be a critical step in this process.

I regularly monitor Great Horned Owl nests in the Edmonton area in preparation for banding the young, and in 2002, there