
NOTES AND LETTERS

ACCIPITER INTERACTION

During the course of spring banding on 17 May 2000, nature had advised me that it was time to rise at 5:15 AM. When I looked out the front window of our motorhome, I could see considerable commotion going on by one of the nets set up in front of our camp in a lane between willows. I made a dash to intervene, and found myself within two metres, and a few seconds, of catching a Cooper's Hawk which had just killed a small, male Sharp-shinned Hawk. The Sharp-shin was caught in the hawk net which had been left in the

'down' position to catch a Long-eared Owl in the area.

A comment in the fall 2000 *Black and White Warbler News*, the newsletter of the Last Mountain Bird Observatory (LMBO), prompted me to write this note. It reads, "LMBO's first sighting of a Northern Goshawk occurred on August 28 when one was observed by Steve Van Wilgenberg and Enid Cumming with prey in its talons. When flushed, the Goshawk left its kill. It turned out to be a Sharp-shinned Hawk – certainly what seems to be unusual fare for this species!"



Adult Northern Goshawk, the largest of the three accipiters in Canada.

Edgar T. Jones



An adult Cooper's Hawk, the middle-sized accipiter.

Edgar T. Jones



Sharp-shinned Hawk, the accipiter most likely to be observed as it tends to work the edges of brushy areas, along which sparrows and warblers migrate.

Edgar T. Jones

A couple years ago, Erhard (Hardy) Pletz, who has been banding hawks and owls for about 20 years, told me about a Cooper's Hawk nest, in which he found three adult-sized legs and feet of a Sharp-shinned Hawk. All this clearly

indicates that accipiters are quick to take advantage of an 'easy meal' even though it is one of their own kind.

We have only three species of accipiters in Canada. The females of all

three species are larger than the males, and a large female Sharp-shinned Hawk can be mistaken for a small male Cooper's. The rounded tail of the Cooper's, if it can be seen, is the feature that distinguishes it from the square-tailed Sharp-shin. All three species nest in thick brushy areas of mixed woods. They might be best described as short-winged, long-tailed bush hawks. Accipiters can be expected to decline if mass destruction of this type of habitat continues cross the country.

- *Edgar T. Jones*, 119 - 215 Blackburn Drive, E., SW., Edmonton, AB T6W 1B9

KESTRELS THINKING 'OUTSIDE THE BOX'

I am ashamed to tell the following story, but to not do so would be a disservice to the kestrels. On June 21, 2001 while checking an American Kestrel nest box, I put a rag in the entrance hole, thinking that I might capture an adult. On opening the door, which was on the west side, there were no adults, just five young too small to band. I closed the door and walked away, not thinking to pull out the rag in the entrance, which was on the east side of the box.

On July 1, I went back to band the young and to my horror, saw that the



Young Kestrel

Brenton Terry

entrance was still plugged. I opened the door, expecting to see five dead birds, but to my surprise, four healthy birds greeted me. One had perished and only a dry skeleton remained. On the side of the bird house, which was made from 1" lumber, there is a knothole, 3/4" in size. This was stained from the parents pushing bits of food in. There was also a spot worn down to new wood where the parents had clung to the box while feeding the young. On July 8, these young were flying. My only defence is forgetfulness, but this shows that birds do not act on instinct alone.

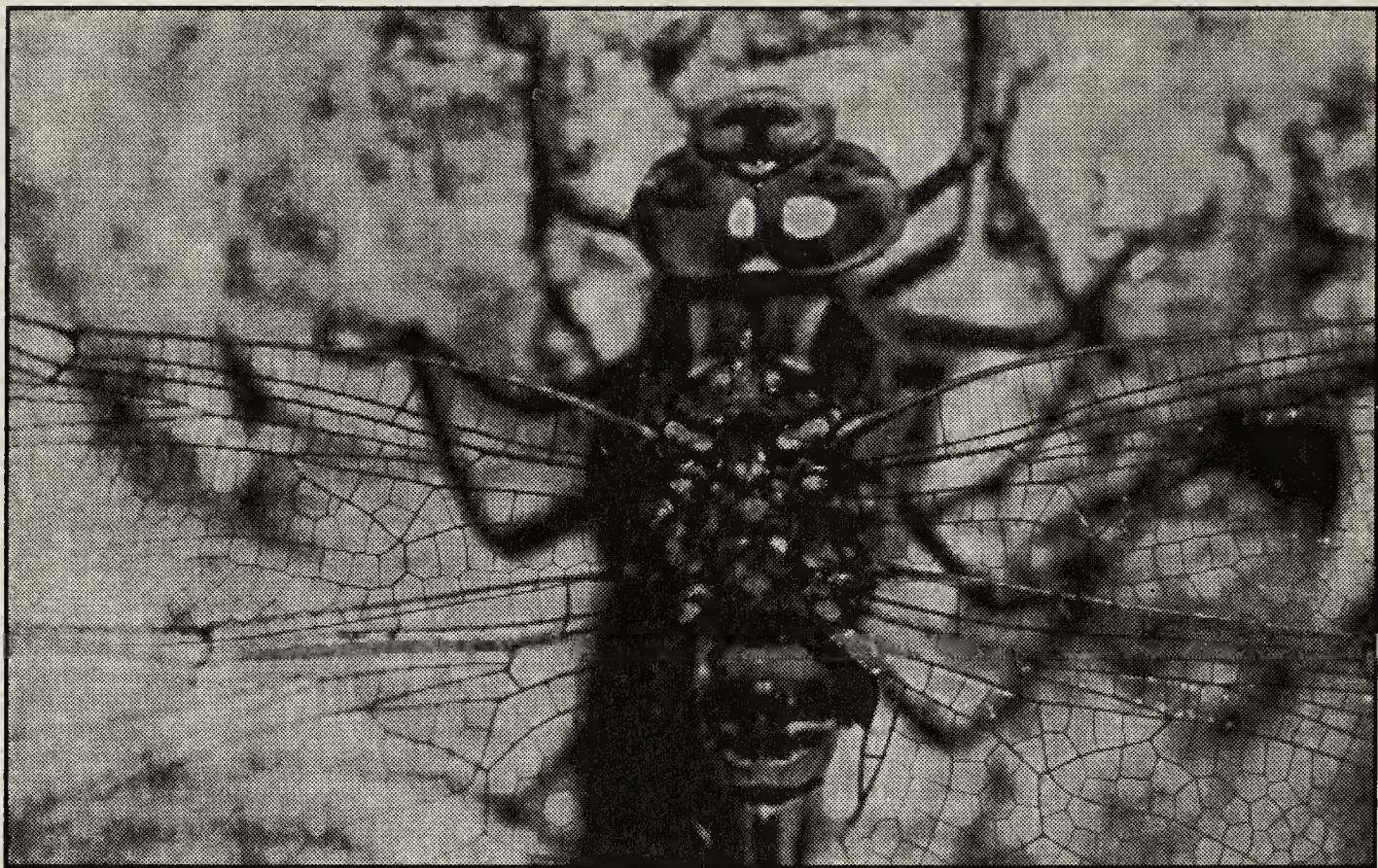
- *Sig Jordheim*, Box 544, Kyle, SK S0L 1T0

AN EARLY SUMMER ENCOUNTER

As a dragonfly darted past us on the shore of Candle Lake, a friend asked me: "Is it true that dragonflies sew up your mouth? My mother used to call them 'devil's darning needles'."

We both laughed. At that moment, I spied a soaking wet dragonfly lying upside down where the sand meets the water. Its beautiful blue eyes still had life. I noticed that as well as being wet, the dragonfly was encased in fluff from the aspen seeds that were everywhere. The pathetic dragonfly had its feet all wound up with white fibre. Its head, which used to be so mobile, was still, with threads of the aspen caught around it.

It had no energy left. It could no longer struggle to free itself, so I began to remove the fluff, one strand at a time. Soon its feet were free. The strands binding its head were harder to release. It had such a small "neck" holding its head to the body that I was afraid I would decapitate it.



Dragonfly

Juhachi Asai

Finally I freed the dragonfly and set it in a sunny spot where it could dry off. The sun's rays would give it energy to fly and become the 'devils darning needle' again – but only mosquitoes believe that tale.

- Betty Arthur, 2321 Albert Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7J 1K3

BRACONID WASPS

[This letter is a response to the answer to the March Mystery Photo published in the June issue.] Entomologists call such wasps "parasitic", but many biologists would object to this, since the outcome of the relationship is always death of the host (admittedly sometimes after the emergence of the developed "parasites", either as adults or terminal larvae to form external pupae). I once studied Parasitology, and most of us then defined a "parasite" as an organism which lives in or on a different species of organism and "harms" it, usually without actually killing the host. The

harm is often slight enough that it is simply inferred. Therefore I would call a braconid wasp a predator.

Such definitions are full of problems concerning what is known or not known about specific examples, and what is the right host vs. the wrong host (the latter are often hurt much more than the former), but conceptually these categories are important.

I also have problems with claiming that braconids and other "parasitic" wasps are "beneficial", since most of them attack specific esoteric host species which are probably not "pests" in any sense, or at least are "pests" that do not require any "fix" by us meddling humans.

- Jim Wolford, Site 1, Comp. 61, RR3, Wolfville, N.S. B0P 1X0