

SNOW GOOSE SUCCESSFULLY COUNTERATTACKS BALD EAGLE

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Although the Bald Eagle is well known as a predator of fish and as a scavenger, its habit of attacking waterfowl, including geese, is also well documented. This report cites a goose - eagle interaction with a different twist.

At mid-morning 17 October, 1992 in company with Claudette Fern Clyde, a lone blue phase Snow Goose was spotted as it stood on a worked field some 400 m east of our vantage point in my vehicle. The bird was situated about 80 m south of the dike road along Edward's Creek approximately 1.5 km west of the creek estuary in the southwest corner of Lake Dauphin. The goose was assumed to be injured, possibly wounded by a hunter's shot, and left behind by the flock. Overcast, calm and mild conditions prevailed.

While observing with 7x binoculars, an immature Bald Eagle appeared further east at a considerable altitude and began a long gradual descent in the direction of the goose which, it became apparent, had been targeted. The raptor's speed, though steady, was not spectacular as it approached its quarry. Seconds before making contact with the goose, the eagle checked its descent changing its attitude of attack from an angular one to a hovering-vertical-drop directly toward the goose. Suddenly, the goose burst upward and engaged the eagle 5-6 m above the earth with its back vertical to the ground and its clawed feet thrust outward to meet the predator's outstretched legs and talons. The aerial skirmish, which involved frantically beating wings of both birds, was over in less

than 3 seconds with the goose returning to the ground fully in control of its flight. The eagle flew upward with typical laboured wing-beats an estimated 150 m then flew off to the southwest before turning back toward the lake in a long arc. There was no indication that the attack would be repeated.

We then drove along the dike-road until opposite the goose where I proceeded toward it on foot. When within 50 m of it, the goose took wing flying powerfully to the southeast at a low angle a distance of 250m and disappeared over aspen woods.

It is not certain that the goose actually flew straight up to meet its attacker. There is some question that a goose is even capable of this. However, from our vantage point it certainly appeared to. On the other hand, had it been viewed from the south or north rather than from the west, we may have seen it rise at an angle or nearly so. Why did the eagle fail to take the goose? As an immature, it was possibly surprised by the counterattack. Its tentative approach to its intended prey - its slow gradual descent; hovering and settling-on-its-prey approach instead of a swooping-grasping attack, suggested inexperience on the part of the eagle, likely a juvenile as indicated by its very dark plumage. Did the aggressive behaviour on the part of the goose stem from its ability to sense the inexperience of the eagle and was it able to further sense that attacking the eagle was a better survival tactic than resorting to escape flight? Perhaps it didn't even see the eagle until the last

few seconds of the attack which may have been a factor in how it arose to meet its adversary.

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Black-capped chickadee - Pike Lake

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