

Marcin TOBOLKA

Department of Behavioural Ecology, Adam Mickiewicz University
Umultowska 89, PL 61-614 Poznań, e-mail: marcin_tobolka@o2.pl

**SPARROW HAWK *Accipiter nisus* ATTACKS SPARROWS *Passer sp.*
ROOSTING IN WHITE STORK NESTS**

Sparrow Hawks *Accipiter nisus* hunt for small passerine birds such as Sparrows *Passer sp.*, Tits *Paridae*, Finches *Fringillidae*, Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and Thrushes *Turdidae*. It can also select bigger prey such as Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Redshank *Tringa totanus* and Pigeon *Columbidae*. However Sparrowhawks usually select prey based on availability in proportion to their relative abundance rather than selecting according to species (Cresswell 1995, Whitfield 2003a, Whitfield 2003b, Reif 2004). In winter Sparrow Hawks forage near settlements where numerous passerines gather for feeding (Newton 1986).

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* nests are good sites for nesting and wintering passerines including House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*, Great Tit *Parus major*, Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*, Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*, Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Collard Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* and Magpie *Pica pica* (Indykiewicz 1998, Indykiewicz 2006, Kosicki et al. 2007). However White Stork nests are very exposed being located on electric poles, high chimneys and tops of buildings. Small passerine birds using these nests for resting or roosting are easily detected and subject to predation, especially before sunset when the raptors such as Sparrow Hawks hunt most intensively (Roth & Lima 2007).

This note reports observations conducted during winter season 2005/2006 and 2006/2007, in the agricultural landscape of western Poland near Leszno (51°51'N, 16°35'E) and Kościan (52° 05'N, 16° 39' E). This is an area of arable fields interspersed with meadows, pasture, human settlements, small forests and some rivers. The White Stork

builds nests mainly on electricity poles (50%), chimneys and roofs of buildings (Kuźniak 1994) in this vicinity.

Observations were recorded at 33 White Stork nests in 2005/2006 and 36 nests in 2006/2007 winter seasons respectively. All nests were observed twice during the winter. Observations were made before sunset while the sparrows were flying into the White Stork nest. Sparrows roosting near these White Stork nests were also recorded. Sparrow Hawk attacks on Sparrows and the behaviour of the potential prey was noted.

House Sparrows roosted in 44.5% and 32.5% of nests in the first and second winter season, respectively. Tree Sparrows were observed in 10.5% and 7% of nests, respectively. Starling roosted on one occasion in the second winter season.

During the study period seven Sparrow Hawk attacks were observed. None of them was successful. All seven attacks were observed at the beginning of winter between the end of December and beginning of January.

On one occasion a female Sparrow Hawk stooped then sat on a White Stork nest trying to catch sparrows, but four Tree Sparrows approached and subsequently a flock of 30 Tree Sparrows roosted outside the nest. In the other six observations Sparrow Hawks did not sit on the white stork nest but hunted from the air.

During two observations some sparrows roosted in the nest while the others stayed outside. In two cases all of sparrows stayed out of the White Stork nest and roosted in the middle of bushes. During three further observations there were no sparrows recorded. Flocks of sparrows sitting in bushes before the attack were very noisy. At the moment of the attack they became silent and hid in the middle of the bushes. After the attack they became noisy again.

Sparrow Hawks hunt around White Stork nests because they are conspicuous and harbour big flocks of passerine birds in winter. It is also possible that Sparrow Hawks hunt near White Stork nests because they forage near settlements in winter.

Sparrows make a decision to spend the night in big flocks in bushes where the temperature at night in winter is very low or run the risk of being attacked by raptors and cache into the Stork nest where the conditions are more favorable. The situation is further complicated because predation risk varies during the course of the day and is highest in the evening (Pravosudov & Lucas 2001). Therefore sparrows must also decide whether to spend more time feeding or hide in the nest earlier thus avoiding raptor attack. These phenomena deserve further study.

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