

PREDATION AT BANDING STATIONS IN ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA

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CARLOS AVERY WMA

FOR DAVE, WITH HIGHEST
REGARDS, BEST WISHES,
AND SO FORTH. Bill

While trapping Blue Jays for banding during the winter of 1981-82, I observed four interesting cases of attempted avian predation in Anoka County, Minnesota. The first incident occurred at my former residence adjoining Carlos Avery Wildlife Management Area (WMA) three miles west of Forest Lake. At about 0730 on 25 November 1981 I set all four cells of an automatic Potter-style trap and captured several Dark-eyed Juncos and American Tree Sparrows during the next two hours. At about 0930 I looked out my front window to see that another Tree Sparrow was caught in one of the cells, and that a rather large raptor was perched on the trap (see photo). The hawk, an immature Northern Goshawk because of its heavy white eye-

line and overall brown coloring, was absorbed in the actions of the sparrow, which was trying to get away. The goshawk remained hunched over the trap for nearly 20 minutes as I took several photographs, and finally it flew northward into Carlos Avery WMA. The sparrow showed no sign of damage when I removed it from the trap, so I banded it and watched it fly away in what appeared to be normal fashion. Two days earlier, I had seen an immature goshawk perched in the red pine plantation just south of my residence; this may have been the same bird. It was probably attracted to my banding station by the large numbers of small birds at the numerous feeders.

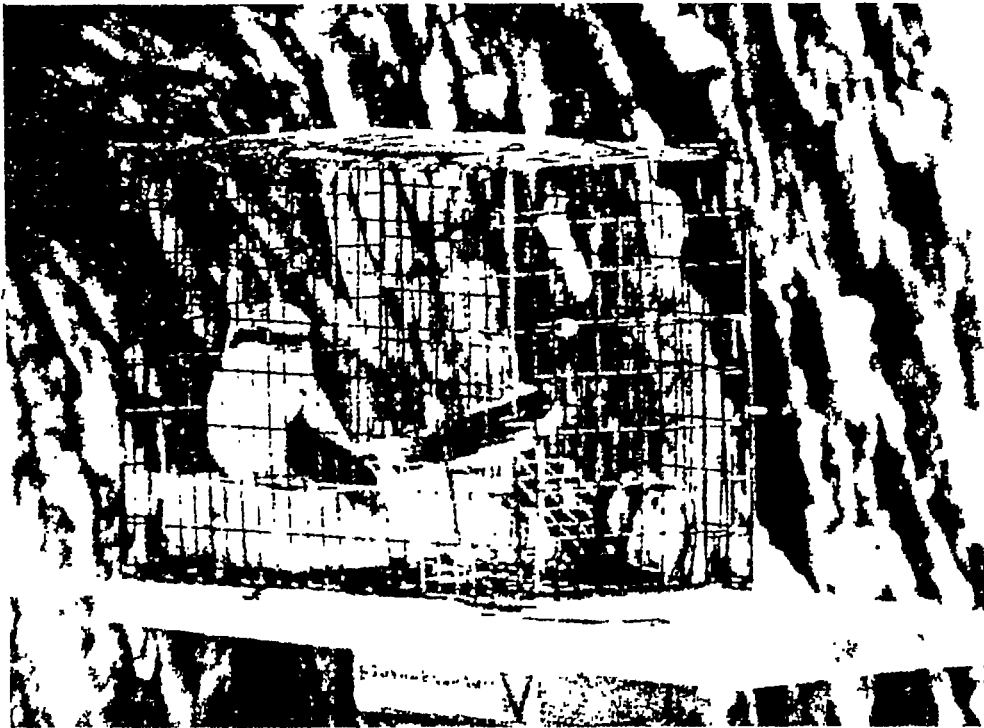
The second incident took place at the re-



Immature Northern Goshawk on trap containing an American Tree Sparrow, Carlos Avery WMA, Minn., Anoka Co., 25 Nov. 1981 — Photo by Bill Hilton Jr.

sident biologist's house that I temporarily occupied at Cedar Creek Natural History Area, a University of Minnesota tract about two miles east of Bethel. During December 1981 I began another banding operation at this location, and by early January large numbers of juncos, sparrows, woodpeckers, Black-capped Chickadees, and other birds were taking advantage of the seed and suet. On 24 February 1982 I was running a variety of traps, including a seed-baited single-cell McCamey on top of a pole about four feet above the ground. At about 0900, I noticed a chickadee caught in this trap and immediately donned my coat to go outside to bring it in for banding. By the time I got out the door, a Northern Shrike had landed on the side of the trap and somehow managed to kill the chickadee through the 1/2" x 1" wire mesh (see photo). The shrike was bold and refused to leave its kill until I approached within a few feet, at which time it flew to a branch about ten feet above my head.

From this perch it watched me for about three minutes while I examined the chickadee, which had been killed by a bite at the base of the skull. Since the shrike apparently was intent on trying to get a meal, I re-set the trap with the dead chickadee as bait. Before I had walked the 30 feet back to the front door of the house, the shrike was already caught in the trap and tearing feathers from the breast of the chickadee. Carefully, and while wearing leather gloves, I removed the shrike from the trap, listening to its loud shrieks and scolding. Because of the faint barring on the breast and grayness of the back feathers, I determined that the shrike was an "adult," i.e., it was hatched sometime before 1981. (Young birds usually show much heavier breast barring and back feathers that are somewhat brown.) I banded and released the bird, and did not see it again. Three days later, I captured an "immature" shrike in almost identical fashion, except that it killed a Common Redpoll through the



Northern Shrike, captured after killing Black-capped Chickadee, Cedar Creek NHA, Anoka Co., 24 Feb. 1982 — Photo by Bill Hilton Jr.

mesh of the same trap. Again, the shrike was able to get to its prey within the 90 seconds that it took me to go from my observation window to the trapping area. Coincidentally, I banded one other immature shrike at this location on 24 January 1982 when it entered a baffle trap on the ground to kill and eat another redpoll. Apparently, all three of these shrikes were attracted to the feeding site because of the flocks of potential prey. Perhaps the long period of deep snow cover in 1981-82 made it hard for shrikes to find food and increased the attractiveness of birds flocking around feeders. It is worth noting that in most winters a half dozen or fewer Northern Shrikes are captured by all the

banders in Minnesota.

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