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### Italian Journal of Zoology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t741771159

### Oral communications

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**To cite this Article** Csermely, Davide(1994) 'Oral communications', Italian Journal of Zoology, 61: 4, 37 **To link to this Article: DOI:** 10.1080/11250009409355970 **URL:** http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/11250009409355970

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# Behaviour of wild rehabilitated buzzards after release

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This study describes the behaviour of a sample of 16 rehabilitated buzzards (*Buteo buteo*) during the first 3 days after release in a farming area of the flatland created by the Po River, a few kilometres from the river itself. The birds were released in the study area individually and in different seasons. The activity of the buzzards was recorded continuously for at least the first three days after release and intermittently afterwards until dispersal from the release site. They were located with radio-tracking devices and observed continuously with binoculars during the day.

The birds remained in the surroundings for even more than 100 days, showing a progressive acclimatisation to the new environment. The distance from the release site increased progressively to  $1295.0 \pm 217.4$  m on day 3, suggesting an improvement of the strength and endurance of pectoral muscles, not fully acquired in captivity during the pre-release flights. Moreover, flight length was positively correlated with both distance from the release site ( $r_s = 0.133$ , n = 692, P < 0.001) and flight height ( $r_s = 0.314$ , n = 219, P < 0.001).

The predatory behaviour was almost normal, although certainly underestimated. Ninety-two predation attempts were observed, whose different techniques were related to the habitat and the season. The buzzards caught most often small mammals, reptiles, and insects (71.5%) but never attempted to capture any bird. Released buzzards interacted frequently with wild territorial conspecifics; however, such interactions were not the direct cause of dispersal. Some birds defended a territory adjacent to or inside that of a wild buzzard. Many buzzards interacted with other species, mainly Corvids, that mobbed frequently, especially the hooded crow (*Corvus corone*).

Although the area chosen for this study had a high level of human population, this was not a major source of interference. Thus, the buzzards appeared to be able to cope with their new environment being minimally influenced by the captivity period.



# Costs and benefits of the nesting association of the Woodpigeon with the Hobby

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Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* nesting in poplar plantations in Northern Italy are found almost exclusively clumped around Hobby Falco subbuteo nests; isolated nests are very rare. We identified 221 prey remains of the Hobby and found that both adult and young Woodpigeons are preyed on (1.4% in number of total prey; 14% in weight); the rate of predation is variable between nests and years. The Hobby fiercely mobs all medium to large sized birds flying within 50 m of its nest; among such birds is the Hooded Crow *Corvus corone cornix*, a very important egg and chick predator, which reaches a very high nesting density in poplar plantations (from 7 to 22 times higher than in open habitats).

We tested whether the risky association of the Woodpigeon with the Hobby results in a reduction of Woodpigeon nest predation. During 1992 and 1993, 210 dummy nests, each containing 2 quail eggs, were set: 1) within 40 m of 8 Hobby nests (5 dummy nests per Hobby nest), and 2) more than 40 m from the Hobby nest. Experiments were repeated during different Hobby breeding phases: incubation, chick rearing (first half, chicks covered by parents), chick rearing (second half, chicks uncovered), fledging (adults and young remain around the nest), and after fledging. Comparisons were made between survival rate (proportion of nests untouched) after 6 days of exposure.

Dummy nest survival close to Hobby nests was significantly higher during the second half of Hobby chick rearing and at fledging (p < 0.01). During incubation, the first half of brooding and after fledging, survival rate of dummy nests was not significantly different between the different experimental groups; however dummy nests around Hobby nests tended to be less preyed on (0.05 ). There was a significant inversecorrelation between the intensity of parental attacks ofthe Hobby on intruders and nest predation around theHobby nest during different phases of the breedingcycle.

We may conclude that, for the Woodpigeon, nesting close to the Hobby is both costly, because of the risk of being preyed on by the falcon, and advantageous, because of the enhanced breeding success due to the reduction of nest predation, which in turn is due to the strong tendency of adult Hobbies to attack intruders.

This research was supported by grants from Ministero Università e Ricerca Scientifica e Tecnologica and the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche.