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## Great Blue Heron Eats Gray Squirrel

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rabbits (*S. palustris*) and cotton rats are common in CA3A. Brown and Amadon (1968) state that Black-shouldered Kites select areas of heavy rodent concentration in which to nest.

Because there were three nests, I believe one or more of these breeding pairs may have nested here in the recent past. Anticipating their return I began to "glass" the area periodically with a spotting scope. As of 25 January 1987 I had not seen any returning kites. On 20 and 23 February Lance McLellan and myself observed a kite perched on dead wax myrtles separated by approximately 2.0 km. Because only one kite was seen on each day, I believe it was the first potential nesting bird of the season. Brown and Amadon (1968) reported that in California the onset of the breeding season is shown when a male selects a perch where he sits daily at certain hours. On 9 and 20 April I did not see any kites in the area.

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**Great Blue Heron eats gray squirrel.**—The Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) is known to capture and eat a wide variety of prey including fish, reptiles, amphibians, insects, birds and rodents (R. S. Palmer 1962, *Handbook of North American birds*, Vol. I, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Univ. Press). However, we have found no reference in the literature to the Great Blue Heron killing and eating adult gray squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*).

On 31 March 1987, Brooks heard the scream of a gray squirrel in her backyard, which is on a brackish lagoon in Ponte Vedra Beach, St. Johns County, Florida. When she looked

out, she saw a Great Blue Heron holding the struggling adult squirrel by the head. At her approach, the heron flew, carrying the squirrel to the lagoon where it perched on rocks in the water. The heron alternately submerged the squirrel, then took it out of the water and vigorously shook it. After about 5 min of alternately shaking and wetting, the heron swallowed the squirrel head first. Apparently the squirrel was still barely alive at this point, though greatly weakened. After swallowing the animal and drinking a quantity of water, the heron flew away. Whether the bird was deliberately trying to drown the squirrel by wetting it or merely lubricating it to ease swallowing is not known.

Great Blue Herons have been known to choke on prey too large to swallow (Palmer 1962). Weights of adult gray squirrels range from 338 to 750 g (J. A. Chapman and G. A. Feldhamer 1982, *Wild mammals of North America*, Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins Univ.), but the smaller individuals are found in the southern parts of the species' range.

Since girth is probably more critical than weight as a limitation on prey size for any predator that swallows prey whole, we measured the girth of a sample of intact road-killed gray squirrels ( $n=3$ ) in Duval Co., Florida in June 1987. Maximum girth was surprisingly uniform at about 15.25 cm, measured at 3 places along the body (forequarters, middle, hindquarters).

Since Great Blue Herons have been observed swallowing prey as large as an Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*) (C. L. Abercrombie, pers. comm.), gray squirrels are probably well below the maximum size prey for this predator. However, the handling behavior of the heron was not appropriate to drown the squirrel, which would tend to indicate that the taking of air breathing animals by the Florida population of this heron is purely opportunistic and without evolved behavior to maximize success.

We thank James A. Rodgers, Jr. and an anonymous referee for helpful comments on the manuscript.—**Jeanette Brooks**, 8 Pablo Road, P. O. Box 561, Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida 32082 and **Robert W. Loftin**, Dept. of History and Philosophy, University of North Florida, 4567 St. Johns Bluff Road, S., Jacksonville, Florida 32216.

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## REVIEWS

**The fall of a sparrow.**—Sálim Ali. 1985. Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press. 265 pp. + 71 black and white photographs. Rs.110 (\$16.95).—In writing this review, I am at once hesitant because I know how little Sálim Ali enjoys public attention. In his own words "it took considerable persuasion from friends and 'fans' to evoke in me the courage to write an autobiography . . ." which would let "*curious* (my italics) people know how and whence I contracted the germs of ornithology . . ." So, at the risk of incurring his displeasure, I am going to recommend this autobiography to anyone with a love of nature, a sense of humor and a curiosity about the progress of ornithology in India. This book has humor in good measure while it tells the extraordinary story of a man who followed his ornithological dream with scant regard for material gain at a time when ornithology was little known and scarcely regarded as a "respectable" profession among his peers. Consequently, Sálim Ali is one of those rare individuals who has lived life to the fullest and still continues to do so.

Scientific ornithology in India was initiated and pursued by the British, mostly by officers in Her Majesty's service. Originating as a "hobby" for many officers stationed in remote areas, it developed into a serious occupation in such pioneers as E. C. Stuart Baker who authored the second edition of the volumes on birds in the "Fauna of British India" series, and Hugh Whistler. Then, into this British dominated sphere came Sálim Ali. He had his appetite for ornithology whetted by a compulsory and nearly continuous stay in the