

## LETTERS

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### MERLINS (*FALCO COLUMBARIUS*) SCAVENGE ROAD-KILLED SNOWSHOE HARES (*LEPUS AMERICANUS*) IN INTERIOR ALASKA

KEY WORDS: *Merlin*; *Falco columbarius*; *Alaska*; *scavenging*.

Merlins (*Falco columbarius*) prey primarily on small birds, insects, and small mammals (Warkentin et al. 2005) using a variety of hunting techniques (Sodhi et al. 1991). Merlins are considered opportunistic hunters (Warkentin et al. 2005), but there are a few reports of their taking injured (Haug 1985) or dead prey (Warkentin 1986, Warkentin and Oliphant 1988, Thomas 1992, Dickson 1997).

In 2007 and 2008, we observed Merlins scavenging road-killed snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*) along the Denali park road in Denali National Park and Preserve (Denali), Alaska. On 4 August 2007, between 0800 and 0900 Alaska Standard Time (AST), we observed two recently fledged Merlins mantling and tearing meat off a snowshoe hare carcass near mile 35 of the Denali park road. Both Merlins remained on the carcass during our 10-min observation before we left the area. On 11 June 2008, from 1200 to 1220 AST, we observed a female after-hatch-year Merlin repeatedly visit and tear meat off a freshly road-killed snowshoe hare near mile 12 of the Denali park road. The Merlin visited the carcass five times during the 20 min we observed before we left the area. During this time, the Merlin flew from the carcass and perched on top of a nearby tree when a motor vehicle approached and returned to the carcass after the vehicle had passed.

Snowshoe hare are utilized both as live prey and carrion by many species of large and medium-sized avian and terrestrial predators and scavengers in Denali including Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), Coyote (*Canus latrans*), Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), Wolf (*Canus lupus*), and Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*), Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Mew Gull (*Larus canus*), Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*), Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia uhula*), Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*), Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*) and Common Raven (*Corvus corax*). Snowshoe hare were abundant in the Denali area in 2007 and 2008, and hares hit and killed by motor vehicles were abundant along the Denali park road, the only

road in Denali, from May to September in 2007 and 2008. Although Merlins occur regularly in Denali and are often observed along the Denali park road, to the best of our knowledge these were the first recorded observations of this species scavenging snowshoe hare carcasses in Denali or elsewhere in North America. Our observation adds to the limited reports of scavenging Merlins.—**Carol L. McIntyre (e-mail address: Carol\_McIntyre@nps.gov), Denali National Park and Preserve, 4175 Geist Road, Fairbanks, AK, 99709 U.S.A.; Jared M. Withers, Denali National Park and Preserve, P.O. Box 9, Denali Park, AK, 99755 U.S.A.; and N.J. Gates, Murie Science and Learning Center, P.O. Box 136, Denali Park, AK, 99755 U.S.A.**

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