ABSTRACTS FOR ISSUE 103(1) FEBRUARY 2001

FEATURE ARTICLES

DIET AND HUNTING BEHAVIOR OF THE CRANE HAWK IN TIKAL NATIONAL PARK, GUATEMALA[1]

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Abstract. We studied the breeding diet and hunting behavior of Crane Hawks (*Geranospiza caerulescens*) in Tikal National Park, Petén, Guatemala in 1994 and 1995. We observed 227 prey items while conducting observations at six nesting attempts, and during opportunistic sightings in the breeding season. Among 181 identified prey items, rodents comprised 47.5%, lizards 19.9%, frogs 16.0%, bats 6.6%, birds 6.1%, and snakes 2.8%; a juvenile skunk also was represented. Rodents accounted for 77% of estimated biomass, including at least eight species representing terrestrial, cursorial, and arboreal habits. More than half of all prey items weighed < 20 g, but 40% weighed > 50 g; many were nocturnal species presumably taken from daytime hiding places. We observed hunting attempts in all strata of the forest and in several forest types. Hunting behavior included still-hunting from a perch and probing with head or feet in holes, bromeliads and other epiphytes, palm leaf axils, crotches of branches, behind bark in living and dead trees, and in puddles. Compared to other raptors studied at Tikal, the Crane Hawk had a moderately broad food niche that overlapped most with other raptors deemed dietary generalists. However, the Crane Hawk's unique anatomical features and hunting behavior enabled it to capture diurnally reclusive prey presumably unavailable to many other raptors, thus facilitating relatively low dietary overlap.

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