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Predation of a Barred Owl by another Barred Owl

On the night of 28 October 2023, while conducting owl migration netting and banding for Mackinac Straits Raptor Watch, near Saint Ignace, Michigan, we witnessed a Barred Owl (*Strix varia*) holding another Barred Owl in its talons. During a net check at 23:45 a Barred Owl flushed from near the ground where it had been standing on the head of a dead Barred Owl. The dead owl had been captured in a mist net array with an audio lure for Northern Saw-whet Owls (*Aegolius acadicus*). In the same net as the dead Barred Owl was an unscathed Northern Saw-whet Owl. When flushed, the Barred Owl flew out of sight into the densely wooded area surrounding the nets, where it proceeded to make a series of harsh, short, vocalizations. We remained in the area for about 15 min while closing nets (due to predicted rain). During this time the owl flew to a snag about 5 m from the net where the dead Barred Owl was found, and perched about 10 m above the ground. The owl was unperturbed by our presence and sat watching us until we left the area. The owl that was killed was a hatch year bird, likely moving through the area as part of its postnatal dispersal. Two nights later on the 30 October, we captured and banded a hatch year Barred Owl in the same net array.

Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*) are known to be a predator of Barred Owls (Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2019). There have been reports of Barred Owls potentially preying upon Spotted Owls (*Strix occidentalis*). Graham (2012) found two uneaten remains of a *Strix* spp. bird on or near a Barred Owl nest. In a note, Leskiw and Gutierrez (1998) document an incident where a Spotted Owl carcass was found and a Barred Owl heard, and when the Barred Owl eventually flew into sight, mottled brown feathers were seen on its claw indicating that this bird could have been the culprit. Another interesting incident involved a Barred Owl found with a dead Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*) in its clutches (Graves and Niemi 2006). In all of these incidents it cannot be confirmed that these birds were not scavenging on

dead birds, but it does show a potential for Barred Owls to be preying upon birds their own size or larger.

Livezey (2007) found that owl species made up 0.2% of all the diet samples he collected from Barred Owls. It also has been observed at many owl banding stations that Barred Owls will prey upon captured Northern Saw-whet Owls. This event seems to indicate that Barred Owls will also prey on conspecifics. Overall this incident seems rather novel, though we know Barred Owls feed on other owls, we do not know of any other incident of a Barred Owl preying upon another Barred Owl.

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