A Record of a Common Buzzard (Buteo buteo) Nesting in an Abandoned Building

Author(s): Carlos Castillo-Góómez and Gregorio Moreno-Rueda
Published By: The Raptor Research Foundation
DOI: 10.3356/JRR-10-114.1
URL: http://www.bioone.org/doi/full/10.3356/JRR-10-114.1
**A RECORD OF A COMMON BUZZARD (**Buteo buteo***) NESTING IN AN ABANDONED BUILDING**

**KEY WORDS:** Common Buzzard; Buteo buteo; breeding; human; nest; nesting site.

Most birds build nests, structures serving a thermoregulatory function for the eggs and later the brood, which are fundamental to successful bird reproduction (Hansell 2000). Thus, the choice of an appropriate nesting site helps to create an optimized microclimate inside the nest (Ontiveros et al. 2008). However, as nests are static structures where the brood and the eggs have little chance of escaping predators, the nest site ideally should minimize the risk of attack by predators (Cresswell 1997). The preferred nesting site often varies according to the environmental conditions, and so species may modify their choice of nesting sites depending on the natural environment which they inhabit. If a bird does not find appropriate nesting sites in a specific area, it may choose a suboptimal site (Monró et al. 1999).

There are many cases in which raptors nest in atypical sites (Ellis et al. 2009). For example, the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and the Bonelli’s Eagle (*A. fasciatus*) generally nest on cliffs, but sometimes nest in trees (Real 2004, Arroyo 2004). The Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) normally breeds in rocky areas, but when these sites are scarce, it may usurp corvid nests (Balfour 1955). These behaviors may occur when birds find good feeding conditions in the area or other factors that might induce their settlement, even if nesting sites are not ideal (Ellis et al. 2009). These phenomena happen naturally in the wild, although they are rare. However, humans can also prompt birds to nest in unusual sites by building structures that may vary from cliffs to flat open fields where they hunt (Grande and Hiraldo 1987, Cerasoli and Penteriani 1996, Tapia 2010). However, they sometimes nest on cliffs (Quilis et al. 1993, Rodrıguez et al. 2010). The elusive behavior of this species causes them to avoid proximity to humans, whose presence negatively affects them (Palomino and Carrascal 2007), making it extremely rare to find a buzzard’s nest on a human-made building. In May 2009, we found a buzzard’s nest on the only remaining wall of an old, semi-collapsed country house (Fig. 1), in the vicinity of Mengibar (southeastern Spain). The nest was located about 3 m aboveground, lower than their conventional nests in trees (which are located between 6 and 25 m aboveground; Zurberogitia et al. 2006), and on cliffs, where Rodriguez et al. (2010) reported heights of 6–175 m (average 67 m), although Palacios Palomar (2005) reported cliff-nest heights of 1–12 m. The abandoned country house was located in a farming area, where human presence is common, making this nesting site particularly atypical for Common Buzzards. Moreover, the nest was 550 m from a busy road and 490 m from Geolit, one of the largest science and technology parks in southern Spain, a site with constant human activity. The nest was made mainly of sprigs of fresh vegetation and twigs, which resulted in a loose structure. It was occupied by three buzzard nestlings, which developed normally and fledged successfully. In February 2010, the wall where the nest was located was demolished, precluding future re-nesting.

That the Common Buzzard chose this site for its nesting was exceptional. After research and consultation with experts on this species, we found no previous record of such a nesting site for the Common Buzzard. The nest lacked protection from weather or predators. We speculated that two factors may help explain why this pair of buzzards chose this place for nesting. First, the field in which the nest was located apparently had an abundance of rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), based on the number of burrows we observed, and the rabbit is one of the main prey items of this species during the breeding season (Mañosa and Cordero 1992). Second, the active agricultural fields were flat, with no natural alternatives (trees or cliffs) where birds could nest. Thus, the wall of the old country house was the only potential nesting site near the fields rich in prey.

This article would not have been possible without the help of Liborio Sánchez Rodrıguez, who reported on the nest’s existence, and Francisco Serrano Gómez, who taught us about the environment in which this atypical nesting took place. Rafael Barrientos, David Ellis, and Vicenzo Penteriani provided valuable information on unusual nest sites.
Beatriz Hernández-Moreno helped in the translation, and David Nesbitt carefully checked the manuscript and improved the English. Comments by Sean Walls and Graham Austin improved the manuscript. We would like to thank them all sincerely, and we also thank all the landowners and neighbors who allowed the nestlings to grow and fledge successfully.—Carlos Castillo-Gómez (e-mail address: charly.signatus@gmail.com), Departamento de Biología Animal, Universidad de Granada, ES-18071, Granada, Spain; and Gregorio Moreno-Rueda, Estación Experimental de Zonas Áridas (CSIC), La Cañada de San Urbano, Ctra. Sacramento s/n, ES-04120, Almería, Spain.

LITERATURE CITED


Figure 1. Nest of Common Buzzard on an old country-house wall, near Mengíbar, Spain, 2009. Note remains of rabbit near the smallest nestling.


Received 23 December 2010; accepted 10 May 2011

Associate Editor: Sean S. Walls