

NOTES

PREDATION OF A COLUMBIA SPOTTED FROG BY AN AMERICAN ROBIN

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In the preceding edition of *Wildlife Afield* Preston (2005) documented the details of what appears to have been the first published report of the attempted predation of a Red-legged Frog (*Rana aurora*), or any frog species, by an American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). This note details the successful predation by an American Robin on a related frog species.

On 4 August 1998, in the lower Blaeberry River valley (Columbia Valley north of Golden, BC), I observed an American Robin (Figure 1) prey on a small Columbia Spotted Frog (*Rana luteiventris*) (Figure 2) on the shore of a small pond. I immediately described the event in my notebook as follows:

“just saw robin catch spotted frog! (3/4” long... closer to 1”) on shore below West Viewpoint - frog escaped three times hopping toward shore but robin recaptured [it each time], dragged [it] back up shore – finally killed or stunned [it] by peck, carried to bare shore [and into] edge vegetation, then off...



Figure 1. The American Robin forages widely on the ground for invertebrates but may opportunistically feed on some small vertebrates it encounters. June 1985 (Douglas Leighton).

(no doubt bareness of new shore made it easier for Robin)”

Several factors probably contributed to this event. The frog, a hatchling recently transformed from the tadpole stage, was within the normal size range of more typical American Robin prey. This opportunistic predation was facilitated by the large expanse of bare earth, which made this prey conspicuous and vulnerable. This unusual exposure was the result of the recent (1997) excavation of this pond, which had removed all existing vegetation in the pond as well as along the edges, combined with the seasonally dropping water level, which was accelerated that year by an exceptionally dry summer.

Another probable contributing factor could be that this bird was one of a pair then feeding large young in a nest only 50 m from where this predation occurred and, in this very dry year, more traditional foods may have been less available. What was presumably the same individual, and/or its mate, was frequently seen hunting along this receding shoreline during this period. Although the number of frog hatchlings observed suggested that other captures or attempts were possible, if not probable, only one event was witnessed. American Robins nest and forage around this pond annually, and spotted frogs are relatively common in this area but this is the only



Figure 2. While Columbia Spotted Frog froglets may be preyed upon by the American Robin, it is considered an unusual food item. Kikomun Creek Park, BC. June 1977 (Douglas Leighton). B C Photo 3442.

instance of this behaviour I have seen there (to 2005) despite regular observations.

Other avian predation of Columbia Spotted Frogs documented at this and adjacent ponds in the lower Blaeberry valley from 1993 to 2005 were by American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*), and Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*). The Northern Shrike, perched low on small spruce snags along the shoreline of a natural beaver pond, was observed in late September preying on Columbia Spotted Frogs which are active in these ponds until mid-October.

Literature Cited

Preston, M.I. 2005. Attempted capture of a Red-legged Frog by an American Robin. *Wildlife Afield* 2:80-81.

About the Author

Doug has been a naturalist since his childhood in Banff, Alberta, a keen birder since his teen-age years in the Okanagan, and worked as a park naturalist with British Columbia Parks Branch between 1970 and 1980. Since the mid-1990s he has been exploring and recording the natural history of the area north of Golden, BC, with a particular focus on the lower Blaeberry valley where he and his wife Myriam have an acreage: home to a Columbia Spotted Frog population - and their predators.