

Peregrine hunting Water Voles in Glasgow

While watching Water Voles *Arvicola amphibius* in the east end of Glasgow (Clyde) on 28 March 2018, I was astonished to observe a Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* attempting to catch a vole as prey.

The Water Vole (Plates 187–188) is a rare mammal throughout Scotland and the UK with numbers suffering severe declines due to changes in agricultural practices and through predation by introduced American Mink *Neovison vison* (Rushton *et al.* 2000, Strachan 2004). Thus the colonies in east Glasgow, where large numbers are found, are of national importance, and are unusual in being present in urban grasslands far from water, with the voles having a fossorial lifestyle, digging holes and living underground (Stewart *et al.* 2017). At the site shown in Plate 189, up to 20 Water Voles inhabit a grassy slope about 1.5 hectares in size, with the slope located in a public park surrounded by roads and housing estates, and the nearest water bodies around 2 km distant. Most of the voles have black fur (Plates 187–188), with a few brown.

Peregrines are restricted in range in Scotland, though numbers of the raptor have increased in urban locations such as Glasgow, with birds

nesting in suitable ledges on buildings and feeding on urban fauna including Feral Pigeons *Columba livia* (Forrester *et al.* 2007). However, prey items, mostly birds, are usually caught in flight by stoop dives, with mammals and other fauna only taken ‘occasionally’ (Cramp 1985, del Hoyo *et al.* 1994).

Hence the observation of a Peregrine attempting to catch a Water Vole on land is highly unusual, possibly unprecedented. The species is not listed as a prey item in Cramp (1985), although other voles of the genera *Arvicola* and *Microtus* are mentioned. However, Water Voles have been recorded from a Peregrine nest in Cumbria, with the remains of three found between 1928 and 1934 (Ratcliffe 1993).

During the hunting attempt in east Glasgow, the Peregrine flew in low and landed next to a burrow hole where a black Water Vole had been present moments before, but the vole had anticipated the attack and disappeared underground. Being black many of the voles are prominent while on the surface of the grassland slope (Plates 187–89), and would be visible to Peregrines which perch on tower



Plates 187–188. Water Voles, Glasgow, Clyde, March 2018. Both these individuals have black fur; smaller numbers of brown individuals also occur. © Chris McInerney



Plate 189. Water Vole colony, Glasgow, Clyde, March 2018. About 20 animals inhabit the grass bank in a public park, which is south facing and about 1.5 hectares in size; many burrows are apparent. Most voles have black fur but about four are brown; up to 12 have been seen on the surface next to burrow holes eating grass at any one time. Arrow indicates a Water Vole. Peregrines have been observed perching on the tower blocks behind the bank. © Chris McInerny

blocks next to the park (Plate 189). Apparently such hunting behaviour is regular at the site, with local people living nearby having witnessed it on a number of occasions, especially when young voles are present. Considering the large numbers of Water Voles throughout east Glasgow it is possible that they form a significant part of the raptor's diet. Perhaps less surprisingly, hunting of Water Voles by Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* and Buzzard *Buteo buteo* has also been observed at this site and elsewhere in east Glasgow.

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