

Nature seems cruel. Fight or flight is an instinct necessary for the survival of an individual creature. Among carnivores, preying on the weak or vulnerable is part of the strategy of survival. Thus, the lame, the old, the weak, the young, the sick are the prey that are targeted by the predators. This is also part of the survival of the fittest in evolutionary terms to select the strongest and the best to procreate and produce offspring that is best for the continuation of the species. Therefore, in daily life, predation continues routinely. This is the story captured in photos of a juvenile Cooper's Hawk hunting and preying upon a helpless altricial nestling songbird in its nest. I spied a large bird flying into a tree on 6-19-19 at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.



When I tracked it down and spotted it in the tree, I recognized it as a raptor from its beak with yellow eyes, streaked breast, and a barred long tail. A Cooper's hawk with features of a young bird immediately came to mind. The hawk was perched on a horizontal branch with a loose bunch of small twigs and sticks at its junction to a major trunk. A nest of a smaller bird belonging to a songbird perhaps. The raptor checked out its surroundings for any threats, finding none it peered into the nest for its contents.







After a few more glances of its surroundings to make certain there were no other intruders around, the hawk leaned over and grasped the nestling from the nest with its hooked beak.





The helpless nestling appeared to have white feathers and dark feet.





The hawk tossed the little bird several times. Whether it is disabling the prey by killing it with its beak or trying to better grasp the prey before flying off with its prize to ingest it elsewhere, I was not certain.





I moved to position myself to get a better view away from branches obscuring the subjects I was photographing. The hawk saw me and abruptly took off. In its haste, it dropped the nestling as it flew away.





I followed the descent of the flightless creature and found it on the ground. No signs of life were present. Its eyes shut, the beak, wings and feet motionless.





I turned the carcass over and noted blood on its skull. The powerful hooked beak of the hawk had perhaps crushed the skull as it inflicted a quick merciful blow to kill its prey. I moved the dead bird from the gravel and the sun to a shaded area below the tree. Nature will recycle the dead. What transpired was a moment of extreme violence where life and death played itself out in the natural order. What followed was tranquility and peace, the calm of Nature as we usually view it.