

FIRST RECORD OF CARTWHEELING FLIGHT IN THE CHIMANGO CARACARA (*MILVAGO CHIMANGO*)

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ABSTRACT.— This note describes novel observations of behaviour in the Chimango Caracara (*Milvago chimango*). The observations were made in a densely urbanized area of Mar del Plata city, Argentina. The first observation describes the first record of cartwheeling flight in the Chimango Caracara. The second observation describes an episode of talon grappling.

KEY WORDS: *aerial talon-grappling, cartwheel-like rotation, Milvago chimango.*

RESUMEN. PRIMER REGISTRO DE ENGANCHE AÉREO CON ROTACIÓN A MODO DE RUEDA DE CARRETA EN EL CHIMANGO (*MILVAGO CHIMANGO*)— Esta nota describe observaciones novedosas de la conducta del Chimango (*Milvago chimango*). Las observaciones fueron hechas en un área densamente urbanizada de la ciudad de Mar del Plata, Argentina. La primera observación describe el primer registro de enganche aéreo con rotación a modo de carreta en el Chimango. La segunda observación describe un episodio de enganche aéreo de garras.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *enganche aéreo de garras, Milvago chimango, rotación a modo de carreta.*

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The term “cartwheeling” describes the feet or talons engaged between flying raptors, which provokes a rotation about a common axis (Simmons and Mendelsohn 1993, Farquhar et al. 1994), whereas “talon grappling” describes the feet or talons engaged without whirling an entire revolution (Ellis 1992). These behaviours are widely reported among Falconidae in the Northern Hemisphere, but are rare among Neotropical raptors (Simmons and Mendelsohn 1993, Figueroa Rojas 2003). Most of these interactions are intraspecific and are usually interpreted as aggressive behaviours (Fox 1978, Craig et al. 1982, Clark 1984, Simmons and Mendelsohn 1993, Farquhar et al. 1994, Kitowski 2001, McDonald 2004). However, interspecific interactions do occur sometimes (Simmons and Mendelsohn 1993, Farquhar et al. 1994, Figueroa Rojas 2003). Intraspecific talon grappling and cartwheeling also can be interpreted as a courtship behaviour, play, or associated with aerial food transfer (Simmons and Mendelsohn 1993, Kitowski 2001, Borello and Borello 2004, Murn et al. 2009). For a possible interpretation of these particular behaviours is essential to have information of the sexes involved, the territorial nature and

the interaction between birds beforehand and afterwards (Simmons and Mendelsohn 1993, Borello and Borello 2004).

On 17 August 2011 at 10:35 h I observed two individuals of Chimango Caracara (*Milvago chimango*) engaging each other by the feet and rotating in the air. They made at least three rotations during 2–3 sec at a height of 10–15 m. After this episode the two chimangos flew with three other individuals. The observation was made in the urban centre of Mar del Plata City (38°00'S, 57°34'W). Neither of the two individuals appeared to suffer injury or lose aerodynamic control as a result of the engagement. Because the interaction before the cartwheeling could not be seen is not possible to make an interpretation of the event. To my knowledge, this is the first published record of cartwheeling for the Chimango Caracara.

Subsequently, in the same area on 30 November 2011 at 16:15 h I observed two individuals in flight chasing each other for approximately 3 min until the chimangos grappled talons with each other for 2 sec. Afterwards, one of the chimangos perched on the asphalted street and took something, presumably a piece of food. The other individual chased the

chimango with the food in flight until they were lost from my sight. I walked 100 m and observed a chimango eating something in a light pole until 16:30 h. In this particular observation, it appeared likely that the individuals grappled talons as part of an aggressive behaviour with the objective to obtain food.

The scarce reporting of talon grappling and cartwheeling among Neotropical raptors (Ellis 1992, Farquhar et al. 1994, Figueroa Rojas 2003) may be because the rarity of the events, or the lack of systematic observation on raptor behaviour (Figueroa Rojas 2003). This note and other publications about Neotropical raptors suggest that talon grappling and cartwheeling are related to aggressive behaviours (Ellis 1992, Farquhar et al. 1994, Figueroa Rojas 2003).

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