

STRANGE DEATH OF A HELMETED GUINEAFOWL

On 20 June 1991, we observed a rather unusual predation event on a Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*. We were observing animals at the Kennedy 1 Pan in Hwange National Park in the early afternoon when suddenly a Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus* stooped down onto a flock of Guineafowl that were foraging approximately 70m from the pan. The entire flock exploded into a panicked escape flight, but fortunately for the eagle, it was able to catch one of the fleeing birds. The eagle proceeded to stand on the ground with the guineafowl secure in its talons underneath it, perhaps to slowly suffocate its prey.

The pan was particularly active that day, with elephants, giraffe, zebra, sable, and baboons centred around it. Apparently oblivious to the mammalian activity, the Martial Eagle continued to stand on the fowl. However, after 13 minutes, a curious female baboon approached to within 2m of the eagle causing the raptor to abandon its bird and fly to a nearby tree. The guineafowl was still alive, but seriously injured: it staggered around convulsive and helpless. The baboon was uninterested in the suffering guineafowl, which was odd because the bird could have been easily caught and eaten. Nevertheless, the baboon wandered away, and within 15 seconds a Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* swooped down and took the guineafowl for its own. This eagle proceeded to behave as the Martial had: namely it gripped the prey with its talons and perched on top of it. Within 30 seconds, a black-backed jackal ran straight to the eagle and fowl. The Tawny quickly took flight, and the guineafowl was snapped up by the jackal. Finally, to add insult to injury, 3 more jackals ran over and mobbed the first, and the unlucky bird was quartered.

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