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Unusual hunting method of Short-eared Owl

Mick Taylor

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At about 15.20 hrs on 17th June 2018, I was watching a Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* hunting over mixed Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* moorland in north Derbyshire. Initially, it was quartering the ground using the usual 'flap-and-glide' method, but this suddenly changed when it flushed a Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*. The owl started chasing the pipit in a manner akin to that of a Merlin *Falco columbarius*, with remarkably agile flight, twisting and turning, sharply undulating between 2 m and 10 m above the ground. This lasted for about a minute, when it caught the pipit in mid-air and carried it c. 200 m to where there were fledged young in a patch of heather.

In over 40 years of upland birdwatching, in this country and abroad, I have

never seen a Short-eared Owl hunting in this manner. I can find no reference to this behaviour in *BWP* or any other of the standard literature. I have discussed this with several observers, including John Calladine (who is doing a long-term study of the species for the BTO), Dick Forsman and Tim Melling, and none of them have seen or are aware of any similar behaviour.

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