The Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) is a raptor of the genus *Hieraaetus*, with a wide distribution in the Palearctic. It is a migratory species overwintering in tropical latitudes, but is resident in the Balearic Islands (del Hoyo et al. 1994), and the number of wintering individuals has recently increased in Spain (García-Dios 2004). It is classified as a species of Least Concern (LC) by the IUCN in Europe. The Booted Eagle is a highly opportunistic raptor, able to live in a wide range of habitats, from lowland open forests to rugged mountainous areas (Steyn 1982, del Hoyo et al. 1994). Despite its relatively small size, the smallest European eagle (García-Dios 2005) is considered a superb hunter (Steyn 1982). Its diet is highly variable, often based primarily on birds, although this species can also prey on reptiles and mammals, the proportions of prey depending on local habitat and prey availability (Steyn 1982, Martínez and Calvo 2005, García-Dios 2006). The Booted Eagle hunts primarily from the air, diving or parachuting from a height of 200–300 m, or even catching birds in flight (Steyn 1982, del Hoyo et al. 1994, García-Dios 2006). However, it seems to be flexible in its hunting strategies, as it may also hunt from a perch, or even by hovering in the wind like a Short-toed Snake-Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*; García-Dios 2005).

We here describe an observation of a hunting technique of Booted Eagles not previously reported for this species, and also rarely observed in any raptors. The observation was made while performing a routine raptor survey in Los Melonares area, in the Sierra Norte de Sevilla Natural Park (Sevilla province, Spain, 37°48’N, 5°56’W). This region is a wide valley with altitude ranging from 110 to 390 m above sea level, covered mainly by scrubland vegetation along the slopes, and grassland at lower elevations, where a reservoir (400 ha) is located.

On 28 October 2004, at 1105 H, we detected an adult Booted Eagle flying. It was gliding toward the far end of the reservoir. Arriving at the reservoir, the eagle started soaring over it, increasing its altitude. Approximately 150 m below the eagle, nine Eurasian Coots (*Fulica atra*) were swimming on the reservoir, ca. 10 m from the shore. Suddenly, the Booted Eagle dived 40–50 m with its wings held against its body and feet extended. Then, after parachuting to slow its speed slightly, it started soaring again and increased its altitude a few meters. For the second time, it dived straight at the flock of coots, which apparently did not notice the presence of the eagle. With this second dive, the eagle reached the surface of the reservoir, catching one coot that was slightly separated from the rest of the flock (less than 5 m), and frightening away the other coots. The Booted Eagle plunged completely into the water, keeping the coot underwater for no less than 10 min. During this time, the coot struggled unsuccessfully underwater, moving its wings, while the Booted Eagle was partially submerged with its wings open. Later, after the coot had probably already died, the eagle remained floating, motionless. It was difficult to determine whether the coot drowned, or was killed by the wounds inflicted by the eagle’s talons, or by a combination of both. Eventually, the Booted Eagle took off from water surface, took its prey to the shore, and started to consume it.

The behavior described may be an unusual and isolated event, but it demonstrates the extraordinary plasticity of this species. Eurasian Coots have not been previously recorded in the diet of Booted Eagles in Spain or in the rest of Europe. In fact, such large prey is uncommon in the diet of this small eagle (García-Dios 2006). To our knowledge, this hunting technique, catching prey on the water and keeping it underwater for a long time while remaining partially submerged, has been previously reported only for Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), a piscivorous raptor, although raptors may bathe in shallow waters (Brown 1976, del Hoyo et al. 1994). Even raptor species regularly catching prey in shallow water, such as sea eagles (*Haliaeetus* spp.) usually submerge only their feet and legs while hunting (Brown 1976, del Hoyo et al. 1994).

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LITERATURE CITED

