

## THE GATHERING OF NESTING MATERIAL BY OSPREYS

by

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The nest of the Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) is composed primarily of large sticks (usually 0.5-1.5 m in length). The sticks are picked up off the ground, or dead limbs are broken from trees while the Osprey is in flight. Although breaking sticks from trees is a well-documented behavior of European Ospreys (e.g., Waterston 1961, Green 1974), it apparently has not been observed often in the United States or Canada. Brown and Amadon's report (1968: 199) that Ospreys take sticks from trees and less often from the ground seems to be based on observations of European Ospreys, judging from their bibliography. Chapman (1908) mentions that Ospreys on Gardiner's Island, New York, broke sticks from trees, and Bent (1937:354) cites Wheelock's report of similar behavior for Ospreys in California. However, Ames (1964) says that he has never seen the behavior and suggests that it occurs rather infrequently. This note comments on the frequency with which Ospreys gather nesting material in the United States by taking sticks directly from trees.

From 2 June through 10 July 1975 I observed Ospreys with unfledged young for 252 hours in York and Mathews counties, Virginia. Sticks and nest-lining material (usually clumps of eelgrass [*Zostera marina*] picked up from the shore) were brought to the nest throughout the summer. Males brought 44 sticks and 12 clumps of eelgrass to their nests. I saw the males collect 3 of the sticks; 2 were pulled from trees, and the other was picked up from the ground. Females brought 41 sticks and 27 clumps of eelgrass to their nests; I saw 3 sticks collected, and all were pulled from trees. Additionally, on 3 May 1975 I observed a male and a female Osprey pulling sticks from pine snags after high winds had damaged many nests in the region. If the instances when I have observed Ospreys gathering sticks are indicative of Ospreys' behavior in general, then a substantial portion of the sticks carried to the nest must be pulled directly from trees.

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