

OSPREY CAPTURES MAMMAL AT EDGE OF SOYBEAN FIELD

by

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Diets of Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) consist almost exclusively of live fish (Sherrrod 1978). Many non-fish items, however, have been recorded and these were reviewed by Wiley and Lohrer (1973) along with proposed explanations for Osprey preying on non-fish foods. Reasons given to explain this phenomenon are: scarcity of fish, unusual abundance of non-fish prey, temporarily unfavorable fishing conditions, poor fishing abilities of young Osprey, and unusual opportunities to take crippled, captive, or concentrated prey items. This note reports an additional reason based on the observation of an Osprey in a very atypical habitat capturing a mammal.

While walking in a soybean field on 18 April 1983 at 1330 in eastern Scott County, Indiana, we saw a large raptor flying low to the ground at the edge of the field. The low flight, long wings, and open habitat initially suggested a Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*). More careful inspection, however, showed that it was an Osprey. The bird's flight was suddenly interrupted as the Osprey wheeled and pounced. Because of the topography of the field, the bird could not be seen at the base of the slope. It appeared, however, to be on the ground at the grassy edge of the soybean field bordered by a woodlot. After several seconds, the Osprey was seen flying above the treeline. Because of the strong, gusting winds, the bird banked several times before flying off. Grasped in its talons was a mammal that appeared to be an eastern mole (*Scalopus aquaticus*) due to its size, shape, coloration, and lack of a long tail. At any case, it was definitely a small mammal that appeared to have been recently killed. Moles have not been recorded in the diets of Osprey (Wiley and Lohrer 1973), although they are occasionally taken by other raptors (Sherrrod 1978).

Osprey are listed as rare migrants and very rare summer residents in Indiana (Keller et al. 1979). Osprey migrating through inland agricultural areas in Indiana will find little optimal wetland habitat for hunting and may be forced to search for alternative prey in suboptimal habitats. The observations we made suggest that at least some Osprey have the behavioral plasticity to successfully do so.

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Literature Cited

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