

Shorebird prey item for Eastern Osprey

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The Eastern Osprey *Pandion cristatus* is commonly regarded as a fish-eating raptor (**Plate 1**). However, it is noted in HANZAB (Marchant & Higgins 1993) that some 2-3% of the typical diet may be non seafood. Several species of seabird have been named as prey items for Eastern Osprey, also quails and pigeons. HANZAB does not document any instances of shorebirds being the prey.

On 5 September 2009, I was carrying out one of my regular surveys for shorebirds at Mudbishops Point near Old Bar (31° 56.95'S 152° 36.41'E). Pandemonium broke out some 30-40m in front of me, when an Eastern Osprey lunged into a group of small shorebirds roosting in front of the dunes. Ten Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis* flew away, making alarm calls, and the Osprey lifted off clutching a small bird in its left foot. I am not absolutely certain it was a Red-necked Stint that it was holding as there also were some Red-capped Plovers *Charadrius ruficapillus* in the same area. However, although they seemed agitated, these birds did not fly away. I strongly suspect that the Osprey struck into the flock of stints.

The Osprey flew slowly away at low altitude, continuing to clutch the bird in its left foot. It

landed in a swale several hundred metres from me, out of sight. About five minutes later, it reappeared, no longer carrying the prey, and landed on a fence post about 100m from me where it perched during the remaining 5-10 minutes of my survey.

I regularly encounter Eastern Ospreys at Mudbishops Point and often see them taking fish from the estuary there. I had previously noted that they sometimes fly over the adjacent sand dunes and beach – it now seems that they may be hunting when they do that. Many shorebirds roost at Mudbishops Point and there is also an important breeding colony for Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*. There would seem to be ample opportunities for the Eastern Osprey to supplement its predominant diet of fish when it so chooses.

REFERENCE

Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. (1993). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne, Australia.)



Plate 1. Eastern Osprey
(Photo: Dan Herbert)