

**ATTEMPTED HETEROSPECIFIC KLEPTOPARASITISM  
BY CRESTED CARACARAS OF OSPREYS**

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Kleptoparasitism, the stealing of already procured food from hetero- or conspecifics, is disproportionately represented by certain orders of birds that includes the Falconiformes (Brockmann and Barnard 1979). Kleptoparasitism reduces the difficulties associated with finding profitable prey, but requires that birds attack vulnerable species and successfully outmaneuver their victims to procure food (Brockmann and Barnard 1979, Gochfeld and Burger 1981).

Crested Caracaras (*Caracara plancus*) have been documented to kleptoparasitize conspecifics, other raptors, and some other species, especially vultures and wading birds (Hamilton 1981, Palmer 1988, Rodriguez-Estrella and Rivera-Rodriguez 1992, Morrison 1996; M. A. McMillian, unpubl.; J. L. Morrison, unpubl.), but successful or attempted kleptoparasitism of an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) has not been documented in the published literature. M. A. McMillian and L. M. Rojas watched a juvenile caracara chase an Osprey that was carrying a fish, in what was probably an attempt by the caracara to kleptoparasitize the Osprey. This observation occurred at 1030 hr on 25 March 2000 along the southern shore of Lake Istokpoga, Highlands County, Florida. Initially, two juvenile caracaras flew out over Lake Istokpoga, 50-75 m from shore. One caracara immediately flew back to the shoreline but the other bird began chasing an Osprey, which was carrying a fish. The chase occurred over water in an area that contained seven Osprey nests, all within 125 m of each other. The Osprey performed 2-3 very sharp left and right turns, then dove towards the water. The juvenile caracara was above and behind the Osprey, but broke off the chase once the Osprey was near the water. On two occasions during the short chase (40-50 m), the juvenile caracara attempted to hit the Osprey with its talons presumably to force the Osprey to drop the fish, but was unsuccessful.

DBM watched an adult caracara chase an adult Osprey in what again was probably an attempt to kleptoparasitize the Osprey. This observation occurred at 0720 hr on 30 March 2000 along Istokpoga Canal, Highlands County. The Osprey was flying at tree-top level along the canal, 200 m west of the bridge on state road 621. It carried a fish in its talons and was calling, probably to its mate, which was some distance from the canal. An adult caracara, which had fed a begging juvenile caracara on the road near the bridge ten minutes before, swooped down on the Osprey from just above and behind and chased it for about 100 m. The Osprey, calling several times, dipped down toward the water, then flew upward in a half-circle, the caracara just behind and slightly underneath it. The caracara was silent and never lowered its talons or touched the Osprey. Finally, the Osprey perched in the top of a large live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) along the canal, the caracara perched 30 m away in an adjacent live oak, and the chase temporarily ceased. After 10 sec, the chase resumed when the Osprey left its perch. A second Osprey came within 100 m, but never interfered in this second chase. This chase was similar, but shorter, than the first. After the Osprey again dipped down toward the water and rose and left the canal, the caracara broke off the chase. The Osprey, which had never dropped the fish, continued flying over adjacent cattle pastures and woods.

The behavior of both caracaras that chased these Ospreys that were carrying fish was similar to the behavior of Crested Caracaras in Baja California that twice pursued single Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) that carried large intact prey, but in neither case did the hawk drop its prey (Rodriguez-Estrella and Rivera-Rodriguez 1992). In south Texas (Hamilton 1981), a Crested Caracara successfully kleptoparasitized intact prey from a Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*). This caracara did not force the harrier to regurgitate prey (cf., Bent 1938, Glazener 1964). Hamilton (1981) also stated this caracara remained silent throughout its chase and did not touch the harrier, similar to our observations of both caracaras that chased Ospreys. Thus, based on aggressive behavior of caracaras toward Red-tailed Hawks and evidence of successful kleptoparasitism of Northern Harrier and other large raptors (Palmer 1988, Rodriguez-Estrella and Rivera-Rodriguez 1992), we believe that both of our caracaras were attempting to kleptoparasitize these Ospreys. Furthermore, M. A. McMillian has observed caracaras to successfully kleptoparasitize intact fish from Ospreys at least five times in the Lake Istokpoga region over the last 10 years, but he did not record details for these observations.

Solicitation of food by the juvenile caracara may have stimulated the adult caracara to chase and probably attempt to steal food from the Osprey along Istokpoga Canal. Morrison (1996) stated that kleptoparasitism by Crested Caracaras is common. Kleptoparasitism of Ospreys by caracaras would be expected of an opportunistic predator with a generalist diet (Brockmann and Barnard 1979, Morrison 1996 and references cited therein). Thus, although kleptoparasitism of Ospreys by caracaras has been undocumented before, this behavior has probably been overlooked. Ospreys are abundant in Florida including the region around Lake Istokpoga where their distribution overlaps with Crested Caracaras. Ospreys may be more vulnerable to kleptoparasitism by caracaras during the breeding season when Ospreys are bringing food to young or their mate. Regional differences in kleptoparasitism may exist among Crested Caracara populations because of differences in abundance of susceptible species, especially in Florida where caracaras are locally distributed (Morrison 1996 and references cited therein).

In summary, Crested Caracaras probably attempted to steal food from two Ospreys in Florida, which had not been documented before at any geographic locality.

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