

NOTES

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GREAT BLUE HERON EATING A PIED-BILLED GREBE

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On 17 February 2001 at approximately 11:30, I observed a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) eat a live adult Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*). The encounter occurred within an 1150-ha impoundment of mostly salt marsh vegetation, located adjacent to the Indian River at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Titusville, Florida. I observed this from a distance of approximately 120 m, while standing on the impoundment perimeter dike. I first noticed the heron, as it stood in an expanse of shallow, open water, grasping the grebe by the neck in its bill. The grebe appeared to be about one-quarter to one-third the size of the heron, and did not appear to be moving. Approximately two minutes later, the heron flew 100 m with the grebe, and landed on the edge of the open water near some vegetation. The heron then began to dip the grebe into the water and re-position the grebe in the bill. At one point the grebe broke free and moved a few meters away from the heron by kicking its legs rapidly. The heron pursued and stabbed several times at the grebe, and quickly recaptured it. The heron then continued to manipulate the grebe as before. After approximately five minutes the heron began to swallow the grebe, which it accomplished within roughly three minutes. After swallowing the grebe, the heron stood in place for several minutes. At first the heron's neck was greatly distended, but after about ten minutes the neck appeared to be normal-sized. The observation ended when the heron flew away over the Indian River. The Great Blue Heron is known to take a variety of prey including fish, invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and birds (Butler 1992). Palmer (1962) summarized accounts of Great Blue Herons eating large prey items, including a Clapper Rail (Arnett 1951) and a Wilson's Phalarope (Packard 1943). To my knowledge this is the first report of a Great Blue Heron eating a Pied-billed Grebe.

LITERATURE CITED

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