

## SANDERLING FEEDING ON CARRION

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While attending the Inland Bird Banding Association meeting at Biloxi, Harrison County, Mississippi, I walked along the beach of Mississippi Sound in front of the Seashore Methodist Assembly at about noon on 22 October 1994. I noticed two birds, a Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) and a Sanderling (*Calidris alba*), standing near an amorphous mass on the tide-line. The gull was picking at and apparently feeding on the mass. When the gull occasionally walked away a few feet, the Sanderling then hurried to the shape and picked and swallowed bits from the same spot. After watching about ten minutes while they repeated this action several times, I approached the flotsam. It was a dead hardhead catfish (*Arius felis*) about six inches long, a species commonly washed up on the Biloxi shore.

The gull flew off as I neared, but the Sanderling pattered off about 15 feet and waited. The gull had pecked through the skin and opened it up to eat the soft interior flesh. The Sanderling had also been feeding at this spot. When I walked on, the Sanderling ran back to the fish and continued to feed on the flesh. This appears to be an unusual sighting of a Sanderling feeding on carrion.

The food of Sanderlings is generally described as minute crustaceans and mollusks, marine worms, sand fleas, flies, and other insects and larvae bared on the beaches by receding waves or secured by vigorous probings in the sand (Bent 1927, Hall 1960:199), although Myers (1988) notes that it responds opportunistically to rich food resources. An additional rich and important seasonal food picked off the beach by myriads of spring shorebirds, including Sanderlings, is the eggs of the horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) deposited by these arthropods in the sand (Bolton et al. 1994). I have seen no mention of carrion as food.

In addition to this unusual view of a Sanderling feeding on carrion, its action in immediately using a food source exposed by a gull is a nice example of symbiotic feeding (Van Tyne and Berger 1959:253) -- in this case the symbiotic feeding would properly be termed commensal, since only the Sanderling benefited and the gull was not harmed by the association.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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