

We saw an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) hunting along Big Creek. The bird dove out of sight and was seen to arise with a dark object held by one foot. The bird circled about, apparently looking for a perch on which to devour its prey. It landed on a telephone pole about 50 feet from us, at which time we could see that the object dangling from the bird's foot was a turtle. The turtle, which was thought to be a painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*), appeared to be about 4 to 6 inches long. Unfortunately the Osprey flew up again and circled around until it was out of sight. We did not see whether it ate the turtle.

Bent (1937. "Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey," Part 1, *U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull.* 170, p. 369) quotes B. R. Warriner (1934), who describes an Osprey taking a turtle, which it could not hold, however. The Osprey we saw had no trouble holding on to its turtle. The above is the only reference we could find to an Osprey preying on turtles.—SERGEJ POSTUPALSKY, 2926 West Thirteen Mile Road, Royal Oak, Michigan, AND JOSEPH P. KLEIMAN, 3271 Albert, Royal Oak, Michigan, 27 November 1964.

Ring-billed Gulls gorge on fiddler crabs.—While assisting in the St. Petersburg, Florida, Christmas census on 29 December 1962, I made the following observations on the feeding behavior of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) foraging at the western end of the Howard Frankland bridge in Tampa Bay.

At 1230 hours I was standing at the edge of a strip of red mangroves (*Rhizophora mangle*) bordering 4th Street watching the maintenance activities of 25 Ring-billed Gulls resting on a mud flat near the mangroves, a loafing area that was regularly used by the gulls. Some of the gulls were preening, others were resting with bills on their backs, some were simply looking about. A narrow tidal creek entered the open water near the mud flat where the gulls were located. Several of the gulls closest to the tidal creek flew up at 1232 hours, patrolled the creek for a minute or so, hovered for a few moments, called loudly, then settled hurriedly on the narrow flats bordering the creek. Almost at once the remaining gulls joined the small group along the creek. I moved closer to see what had attracted the gulls and saw that the flats along the creek were literally teeming with fiddler crabs (*Uca pugnator*).

The 25 gulls began to gorge themselves with crabs; this group was soon joined by an additional 50 Ring-billed Gulls. The entire group continued to feed in a frenzied manner for about 2-3 minutes, and then the entire flock rose almost in unison, flew over 4th Street, settled at the edge of a different tidal creek, and began to mill about and call loudly. I ran across 4th Street and saw that the gulls had settled near a horde of fiddler crabs that were milling over the mud flats at the edge of the red mangroves. Within 5 minutes an additional 100 gulls had joined the first group. The gulls gorged on the crabs, flew up in small groups, settled again, called loudly, flew over the mangroves, settled at another tidal creek, and then repeated this behavior many times. By 1300 hours I estimated that 1,500 Ring-billed Gulls had been attracted to the abundant food source, probably by a combination of visual and auditory stimulation from the milling flocks already present.

I watched the manner of prey capture and food handling repeatedly: a gull would land among the milling crabs, briefly chase one and then seize it, and then the gull would appear to deftly remove the enlarged cheliped with a snap of its mandibles, although autotomy was more likely the cause of cheliped loss. Usually the crab dropped from the gull's grasp along with its severed cheliped, but the gull simply ran after the crab, grasped it, and then tossed it down its gullet hurriedly. One gull I watched

captured, handled, and swallowed 15 crabs in rapid succession. I saw another gull whose throat bulged from engorged crabs, and when I chased it the bird barely evaded my grasp.

Most of the crabs simply milled about in the confusion, but many of them scurried into the short red mangroves; it was noteworthy that the gulls did not pursue any of the crabs into the mangroves. As soon as a flat had been almost cleaned of crabs the gulls would rise, mill about, fly over the denser mangrove area, locate another throng of crabs in the open, then descend and feed as rapidly as possible. By 1315 hours almost all of the gulls had left the mangrove area and flown out over Tampa Bay or had returned to the nearby loafing area. Many crabs remained along the margins of the tidal creeks, but apparently the gulls had been satiated by the superabundant food supply. I saw no signs of any unusual disturbance, and I doubt that my presence drove the gulls away. I walked up and down the edges of the creeks for about 10 minutes and saw that the flats were strewn with severed chelipeds; I found a few badly damaged whole crabs but mostly severed claws. At this time most of the crabs were either in tangles of short red mangroves or else hiding in burrows. Perhaps the general movement of the crabs into such cover stalled the frenzied foraging of the gulls, even though a few crabs were still vulnerable as they scurried over the open flats.

Several Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and hundreds of Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) were definitely within visual and auditory range of the screaming, milling Ring-billed Gulls, yet I did not see a single individual of either species attracted to the bountiful food supply. Five raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) were seen foraging on a mud flat several hundred yards from the main feeding area of the Ring-billed Gulls, but I did not see any overt indication that the raccoons were aware of the gulls' activities.

Frings, Frings, Cox, and Peissner (1955. *Wilson Bull.*, 67:155-170) described and recorded a food-finding call of the Herring Gull, and they were able to demonstrate that playbacks in the field of this call succeeded in attracting gulls of this species to the sound source area from a distance of 3-5 km. Such calls are known from a few other species, particularly in parent-young food relationships (Collias, 1960. *Animal Sounds and Communication*. Amer. Inst. Biol. Sciences, Washington, D.C., pp. 369-370). I do not know if Ring-billed Gulls have a food-finding call; I was not able to record and experiment with their vocalizations. Thorpe (1961. *Bird-Song*. Cambridge Univ. Press, p. 24) suggests that food-finding calls "are probably rather unusual since it will only be desirable to attract a large number of individuals of a species to a particular food source from over a wide area when that food source is both abundant and ephemeral." The fiddler crabs were clearly abundant, and they were ephemeral in the sense that they were no longer available as food for the gulls once they took cover in burrows and in the dense, short red mangroves. If the Ring-billed Gull does have a food-finding call it might account for the very rapid gathering of gulls I saw, but visual attraction cannot be ruled out until experimentation reveals an acoustic attraction signal. I do not know why the Herring and Laughing Gulls were not attracted to the abundant food supply; they were within visual and auditory range, and later I saw several individuals of these two species foraging on a nearby mud flat, which suggests that they were not satiated from prior foraging activities while the Ring-billed Gulls were gorging on the crabs. Seemingly the temporary superabundance of fiddler crabs would have permitted feeding without competition by the three species, but only the Ring-billed Gulls were opportunistic at the time of my observations.—ANDREW J. MEYERRIECKS, *Department of Zoology, University of South Florida, Tampa, 30 October 1964.*