

ATTEMPTED KLEPTOPARASITISM BY WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLES ON FUR-SEAL. There are many records of White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* attacking conspecific birds and other species in the attempt to pirate prey (summarised in Marchant and Higgins 1993). In the incident reported here two sub-adult sea-eagles were observed on 15 June 2006, inside the Murray River estuary near the Mundoo Channel outlet (35°33'32"S, 138°58'56"E), continuously circling and stooping on what appeared to be a juvenile New Zealand Fur-seal *Arctocephalus forsteri* which remained at the surface with a fish. This 'attacking' behaviour (see Figure) was vigorously maintained by both eagles over a period of 10–12 minutes during which time the seal continued to thrash its captive prey from side-to-side, seemingly ignoring the attacks until the last moment when the fish was drawn under and away from the eagles talons. During this sustained attack, both eagles vocalized almost continuously and the activity drew the attention of around 25 Australian Pelicans *Pelecanus conspicillatus* and 8–10 Whistling Kites *Haliastur sphenurus*, all of which remained poised nearby adding to the spectacle.

In an account of similar observations from Wingan Inlet in East Gippsland, Victoria, up to three sea eagles were involved in prolonged attacks on seals over two consecutive days and at least one heavy talon strike on a seal was observed (Hollands 1972). Despite the vigour and duration of the attack we observed, the seal itself did not appear to be the target, as once the fish disappeared (presumed to have been finally

consumed by the seal) both eagles immediately appeared to lose interest. One flew off seaward toward the Younghusband Peninsula and the other perched on a nearby channel navigation marker.

Juvenile and sub-adult White-bellied Sea-Eagles are frequently observed in the Murray Lakes and Northern Coorong region but there are no confirmed records of the species breeding there (TD unpubl. data).

The fish held by the seal was estimated to be around 300–350 mm in length and therefore most likely a small Australian Salmon *Arripis trutta* or Mulloway *Argyrosomus hololepidotus*, both of which are common in the vicinity (pers. obs.).

In recent years, juvenile and adult New Zealand Fur-seals have been frequently recorded foraging inside the Murray River estuary. Most sightings were near the outlet channel, but they have been seen as far south as the Ewe Island Barrage in the northern Coorong, a distance of around 7.5 km from the sea (TD unpubl. data).

REFERENCES

- Hollands, D.W.G. 1972. White-breasted Sea-Eagles attacking a seal. *Australian Bird Watcher*, 4 (7): 238.
 Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. (eds.). 1993. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds. Volume 2, raptors to lapwings*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
 Terry Dennis: 5 Bell Court, Encounter Bay, South Australia 5211; <osprey84@bigpond.net.au>
 Ross Brittain: 85 Cudmore Road, Victor Harbor, South Australia 5211

Received 19 July 2006; accepted 21 September 2006

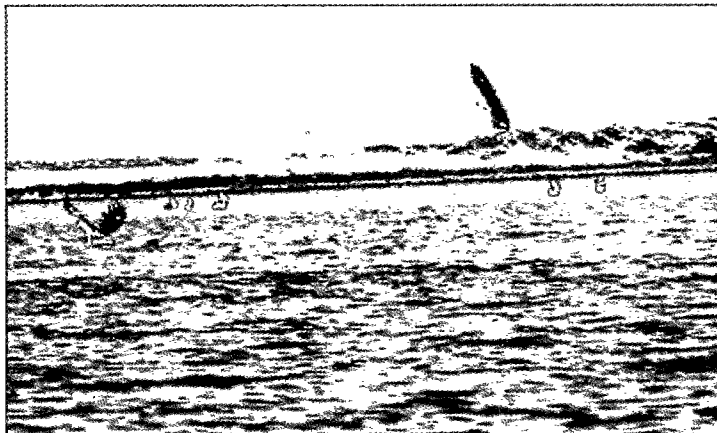


Figure. The fur-seal is just visible below the sea-eagle at the left of the picture (photographer Ross Brittain)