

Note

Swimming Long-tailed Vole (*Microtus longicaudus*) Killed by an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

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Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) are piscivores, and observations of them preying on non-fish species are rare. I observed an Osprey preying on a Long-tailed Vole (*Microtus longicaudus*) that was swimming in the Sikanni Chief River in northeastern British Columbia. This is one of few reports of an Osprey preying on a small mammal, and it provides further evidence that Osprey may prey on such species as the opportunity arises. This observation also points to the apparent vulnerability of small rodents to novel predators while they are swimming.

Key Words: Long-tailed Vole; *Microtus longicaudus*; Osprey; *Pandion haliaetus*; predation

Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) are piscivores, with more than 99% of their diet composed of fish (reviewed by Poole *et al.* 2002). They tend not to be selective in terms of the species of fish they consume, but they are selective when it comes to size of prey, with individual fish usually measuring 25–35 cm (Poole *et al.* 2002). Most prey are taken alive; Ospreys rarely scavenge.

Observations of Osprey preying on non-fish species are rare; however, several instances of Osprey preying on small mammals have been documented. Specifically, Proctor (1977) and Campbell and Hillary (2009) reported three observations of Ospreys preying on Meadow Voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), while Wiley and Lohrer (1973) described a pair of Ospreys regularly preying on Hispid Cotton Rats (*Sigmodon hispidus*). Larger rodents have also been documented as prey of Osprey, including an Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*; Taylor 1986), a Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*; Kern 1976), and an unidentified species of ground squirrel (*Urocitellus* sp.; Werren and Peterson 1988). Most of these observations have been of Osprey killing these mammals while they were on land, usually near a waterbody or en route from an inland nesting site, exceptions were a Meadow Vole (Campbell and Hillary 2009) and a Muskrat (Kern 1976) that were captured while swimming. Nevertheless, small mammals are apparently rare prey of Osprey (Wiley and Lohrer 1973). Here, I report an additional observation of an Osprey preying on a small mammal.

On 23 August 2014, I was angling on the south side of the Sikanni Chief River (57.24069°N, 122.68529°W), approximately 155 km northwest of Fort St. John, British Columbia. At approximately 07:50 Mountain Standard Time, I observed a small mammal, which I initially identified as a juvenile Muskrat, swimming

across the river about 25 m upstream of my position. Earlier that morning, I had observed an Osprey perched on a large, live White Spruce (*Picea glauca*) tree on the north shore of the river. Within ≤ 1 minute of my observing the swimming small mammal, the Osprey left its perch and plunged toward the water, emerging with an animal taken from the middle of the river. The Osprey flew about 15 m above the water, dropped the mammal, circled back over the north side of the river, and flew out of sight.

Fortunately, the Osprey dropped the mammal on a rocky shore on the south side of the river, where, after several minutes of searching for it among the rocks, I found it dead. I identified it as a Long-tailed Vole (*Microtus longicaudus*), based on its general size, head shape, and, specifically, its long, bi-coloured tail (Smolen and Keller 1987; Nagorsen 2005). It is not known why the Osprey dropped the vole, but perhaps it had lost interest in the vole as prey.

This observation is of scientific value from two perspectives. First, Osprey are not usually regarded as predators of small mammals (Wiley and Lohrer 1973; Poole *et al.* 2002). Others have reported similar incidents of Osprey apparently preying on voles (Proctor 1977; Campbell and Hillary 2009); however, both reports assumed that the species was a Meadow Vole and identification was unconfirmed. Here, I was able to positively identify the species of vole taken. Regardless, taken together, these observations suggest that Osprey may occasionally prey on small mammals, such as voles, when the opportunity arises.

Second, it is interesting that the vole drew the Osprey's attention and was attacked while it was swimming. One of the apparent Meadow Voles observed to be killed by an Osprey by Campbell and Hillary (2009)

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was also captured when it was in the water. Thus, although some species of small mammals may only occasionally enter the water, they may be susceptible to novel predators while swimming (*sensu* Jung *et al.* 2011).

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