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Wood Storks Feeding on Fish from Dredging Activities

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Wood Storks feeding on fish from dredging activities.—While excavating water and bottom material, the hydraulic dredge also entrains many resident organisms, including fish, and deposits them as well as the excavated material into diked disposal areas. The fish that pass through the dredge are usually alive or freshly killed when deposited on the disposal site. Hydraulic dredging and upland disposal operations have provided an unusual feeding opportunity for Wood Storks (*Mycteria americana*) in east-central Florida.

This phenomenon was first observed on the J. F. Kennedy Space Center, Brevard County, Florida, in the spring of 1978 during maintenance dredging of the Saturn Barge Canal in the Banana River. As many as 35 Wood Storks were seen picking up fish, mostly 10-20 cm sea (*Arius felis*) and gafftopsail (*Bagre marinus*) catfish as they rolled out the discharge pipe (Scott Clark pers. comm.). In 1978 during banding operations at the Moore Creek Wood Stork colony (10 km away from the disposal areas), young storks regurgitated small sea catfish indicating that the adults were utilizing dredged fish to feed young. Wood Stork productivity in 1978 was the worst ever recorded in Florida (John Ogden pers. comm.), but the Moore Creek rookery fledged 225 storks out of 150 nest attempts (Clark 1978, Proc. Colonial Waterbird Group 1978: 178-188), possibly because of being supplemented by the dredged fish. Wood Storks feeding around spoil sites frequently appeared gray instead of the usual white plumage because of being splattered by discharge material. Wood Storks continued to use disposal areas as late as August, 1978 (Scott Clark pers. comm.).

Again in 1986 Wood Storks were observed feeding at hydraulic dredging disposal areas. Maintenance dredging of the Barge Canal and Port Canaveral in Brevard County, Florida, provided two disposal areas. Wood Storks were seen feeding at both sites since operations began in June. As many as 75 storks, one-third of which were immature, were observed at one time feeding and loafing in the vicinity of the Barge Canal disposal area. Many of these birds remained in the area for several days when spoiling operations were halted. Wood Storks continued to feed in the disposal areas through September. Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) and Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*) frequently were seen feeding in the disposal areas with the Wood Storks.

Hydraulic dredging and disposal operations in the vicinity of Wood Stork colonies may provide additional food for Wood Storks if properly planned. April and May operations may provide supplemental food for nestlings and summer operations may increase the survival rate of young of the year birds. Once begun, especially during the nesting period, it is important that this food source not be interrupted for any length of time. If interrupted the birds dependent on this food may be in jeopardy if an alternative food source cannot be found readily. This additional food should not be considered as mitigation for the dredging operation. The food source benefits provided the Wood Stork may be far outweighed by other environmental hazards not addressed here. However, it appears that the Wood Stork is a very adaptable species and is able to take advantage of unusual foraging opportunities.—Willard P. Leenhouts, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, P. O. Box 6504, Titusville, Florida 32782-6504.

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Osprey killed by lightning at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Florida.—On 13 June 1986, the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge received a report that a 20 m steel U. S. Geological Survey bilby tower containing an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) nest at the top was struck by lightning and that an Osprey fell out of the nest at the time of the lightning strike. A ground inspection at the base of the tower two hours later revealed a dead immature Osprey. The carcass was sent to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Health Laboratory. The post-mortem diagnosis was "electrocution by lightning strike based on history, the presence of pulmonary edema, and lack of any other obvious cause."