

Brown Thrasher Preys on Fiddler Crab.

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At 0805 on 4 July 1991 I saw two Brown Thrashers (*Toxostoma rufum*) at the edge of a dirt road in Sneads Ferry, Onslow County, North Carolina. One bird darted out into the road and seized a Brackish-water Fiddler Crab (*Uca minax*) in its bill. This bird then flew off into a thicket with the crab. Sources cited in Bent (1964. Life histories of North American nuthatches, wrens, thrashers and their allies. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. No. 195. Dover Publ. New York) examined over 266 stomachs of Brown Thrashers. Insects (beetles, caterpillars, cicadas, tree-hoppers, grasshoppers, and crickets) and the berries or fruits of over 30 species of plants constituted the principal food items found. Unusual food items cited in Bent included crayfish, lizards, salamanders, and tree frogs. Fiddler crabs are not listed as prey of the Brown Thrasher, nor are other marine or estuarine organisms.

The specific location of the crab capture was in an upland plant community about 300 m from the nearest brackish marsh vegetation (primarily *Juncus roemerianus*), the preferred habitat of this species of fiddler crab. Dominant plants at the site were Post Oak (*Quercus stellata*), Blackjack Oak (*Quercus marilandica*), White Oak (*Q. alba*), Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*), and feral Scuppernong Grapes (*Vitis* sp.).

I have observed what appears to be local overland dispersal movements of *U. minax* each June and early July (noted each year, 1985–1991) in the Sneads Ferry area. Fiddlers are frequently encountered on dry, sandy roads 300–400 m from marshes at this time of the year. On 6 July 1991 I measured and determined the sex of 23 *U. minax* that had been involved in these high-ground movements. Twelve were males whose carapace width averaged 20.9 mm (range 16–27 mm). The claw segment of the large cheliped on these males averaged 31.8 mm (range 17–48 mm) in length. The carapace width of eleven females averaged 19.6 mm (range 16–22 mm). Thus, adults and juveniles of both sexes were involved in the overland movements.

In summary, the Brown Thrasher opportunistically encountered and captured a novel prey item, the fiddler crab, as the crab was engaged in an overland dispersal behavior away from its normal marsh habitat. Since the Brown Thrasher and its close relative the Northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos*, (Bent, A.C. 1964. Life histories of North American nuthatches, wrens, thrashers and their allies. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. No. 195. Dover Publ. New York) are known to take crayfish, it is not surprising that thrashers consume other small crustaceans opportunistically. Bent (1964. Life histories of North American jays, crows and titmice. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. No. 191. Dover Publ., New York) reported that Fish Crows (*Corvus ossifragus*) also take crustaceans: shrimp, crayfish, and small crabs, especially fiddlers.

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