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SHORT NOTE

Variable (*Haematopus unicolor*) and pied oystercatchers (*H. finschi*) feeding on lion's mane jellyfish (*Cyanea* sp.)

DAVID S. MELVILLE
Dovedale, R.D. 2 Wakefield, Nelson 7096, New Zealand

On the afternoon of 28 Sep 2010, 138 non-territorial variable oystercatchers (*Haematopus unicolor*) were observed on a tidal sandflat adjacent to the Bell I shellbank, Waimea Inlet, Nelson (41.2911 S, 173.1832 E). The group included first- and second-year birds, as well as individuals showing 'adult' (third year or older) plumage and soft part characteristics. Most birds were roosting but at any one time up to 5 individuals were seen feeding on lion's mane jellyfish (*Cyanea* sp.) that were stranded on the sand. The jellyfish were somewhat desiccated and had probably been stranded for 24 h or more as the tide series was falling from a peak on 25 Sep. The birds pecked at the bell of the jellyfish and were observed to swallow pieces up to about 1 cm^3 in size.

On the morning of 7 Oct 2010, I observed up to 20 South Island pied oystercatchers (*H. finschi*) apparently feeding on lion's mane jellyfish at an unnamed sand island off Nelson Airport, Waimea Inlet (41.2907 S, 173.2074 E). On this occasion large numbers of jellyfish were freshly washed up on the sand as well as swimming in shallow water off the island. The oystercatchers were walking in the water, up to belly deep, and were seen carrying the dark brown oral arms of the jellyfish in their bills. I did not see any bird swallow these jellyfish arms but was only able to observe the birds for about a minute.

Cyanea sp. are venomous (Tibbals 2006) and can inflict severe stings to humans (Ministry of Health 2012), even after being stranded for a long time (Barnett 2010), although these are not considered to be medically serious (Slaughter *et al.* 2009). Burnett & Calton (1991) reported nematocysts on the tentacles and the oral lobes of *C. capillata*, these being discharged when the tentacle was stimulated by pressure. Thus, it might be expected that the South Island pied oystercatchers were subject to stinging.

There appear to be no previous records of either species of oystercatcher feeding on jellyfish (Oliver 1955; Baker 1974; Marchant & Higgins 1993) and this behaviour appears to be unrecorded in most other species of oystercatcher worldwide (Cramp & Simmons 1982; Urban *et al.* 1986; Marchant & Higgins 1993; Hockey 1996). Johnsgard (1981) recorded the Magellanic oystercatcher (*H. leucopodius*) feeding on 'stranded jellyfish' (species unidentified). Although not recorded in the diet of the American oystercatcher (*H. palliatus*) by Nol

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Correspondence: *david.melville@xtra.co.nz*

& Humphrey (1994), Meyers (2010) noted jellyfish (species unidentified) among 'major food items' of this species, and John Sabine (*in litt.* 27 Jun 2012) recorded American oystercatchers feeding on cannonball jellyfish (*Stomolophus meleagris*) washed up on oceanfront beaches. Andres & Falxa (1995) reported American black oystercatcher (*H. bachmani*) feeding on the hydrozoan by-the-wind-sailor (*Velella velella*), these being beach cast in Sonoma County, California (Gary Falxa *in litt.* 8 Feb 2011).

Only 2 other waders are recorded as feeding on scyphozoan jellyfish: sanderling (*Calidris alba*) and grey plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*; Ates 1991). However, their occurrence in the diet of seabirds is more widespread (Ates 1991; Aria 2005; Harrison *et al.* 1983; Harrison1984; Shiomi & Ogi 1992; Suazo 2008), and their importance may be under recorded in waders such as oystercatchers due to difficulties of identifying prey remains.

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