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SWIMMING BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERONS (*NYCTICORAX NYCTICORAX*) KLEPTOPARASITIZE AMERICAN COOTS (*FULICA AMERICANA*)

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ABSTRACT—I observed black-crowned night-herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) swimming and kleptoparasitizing American coots (*Fulica americana*) at an artificial lake in Pinal County, Arizona. This appears to be the first record of interspecific kleptoparasitism by a swimming ardeid.

RESUMEN— Observé garzas nocturnas coroninegras (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), nadando y cleptoparasitando a fochas americanas (*Fulica americana*) en un lago artificial en el condado de Pinal, Arizona. Parece ser el primer registro de cleptoparasitismo interespecífico por un ardeid al nadar.

The cosmopolitan black-crowned night-heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) exhibits a wide range of foraging behaviors including bill vibrating, hovering, plunging, and swim-feeding (Kushlan, 1976). Swim-feeding refers to a heron alighting on the water and swimming to capture prey (Kushlan, 1976). The first record of swim-feeding in night-herons was observed nearly a century ago in New Mexico (Wetmore, 1920), and a few reports have been subsequently published including instances from Mississippi (Taylor et al., 2010), Egypt (White, 1947), Greece (Allsopp and Allsopp, 1965), Hungary (Gábor, 2001), and India (Parasharya, 1982). Here I report an observation of swimming night-herons successfully kleptoparasitizing American coots (*Fulica americana*). Many species of herons have been observed to engage in interspecific and intraspecific kleptoparasitism (Kushlan, 1978; Collins, 2006), but this appears to be the first report of interspecific kleptoparasitism by a swimming ardeid.

On 17 January 2014 (1100–1145h), I observed an aggregation of ducks, Neotropic cormorants (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*), pied-billed grebes (*Podilymbus podiceps*),

and 75 American coots diving to feed on small fish in an artificial lake (1.17 ha) on the Arizona City golf course, Pinal County, Arizona (32°45.04'N, 111°40.09'W). A single great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), three great egrets (*Ardea alba*), and 11 black-crowned night-herons were perched on the elevated margins of the pond. None of the herons were wading. I observed a night-heron fly from shore and alight near the center of the lake (Fig. 1). The night-heron swam about 5 m directly toward a group of foraging coots, cormorants, and ducks and intercepted a coot that surfaced with a small silvery fish (~4–6 cm) in its bill. I could not determine whether the fish had been scavenged or captured alive. The coot dropped the fish when the heron jabbed at it. The night-heron swallowed the fish and then easily lifted from the water and flew to shore. This successful behavior with coots was observed three times in a 20-min period, involving three different night-herons including a streaked immature. An attempt to kleptoparasitize a cormorant was unsuccessful. Night-herons were twice observed to alight on the water and swim without attempting to feed. The duration of these swimming bouts each exceeded 3 min.

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FIG. 1—Black-crowned night-heron swimming (top) before kleptoparasitizing an American coot and lifting off the water afterward (bottom) on an artificial lake in Pinal County, Arizona. This figure is available in color online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1894/MCG-11.1>.