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

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Submitted 21 October 2013.
Acceptance recommended by Associate Editor, Fausto Méndez de la Cruz, 18 January 2015.

The Southwestern Naturalist 60(1): 130–131

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.
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.

I thank the Alexander Wetmore Fund of the Smithsonian Institution and the Smoketree Trust for funding and three anonymous reviewers for helpful comments.

**LITERATURE CITED**


Submitted 8 February 2014.

Acceptance recommended by Associate Editor, M. Clay Green, 9 September 2014.