

KLEPTOPARASITISM OF BLACK-HEADED AND SLENDER-BILLED GULLS.

GIORDANO S. ANGLE

Stazione Romana – Osservazione Protezione Uccelli
c/o Oasi WWF “Bosco di Palo”
Via Palo Laziale 2 – 00055 Ladispoli (Roma)

On March 7th 1981 a flock of 12 Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* food-stealed a flock of about 20 Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* on a meadow at the NE border of lake Fogliano (Circeo National Park, Central Italy). The parasitic behaviour, which had probably already started when the observations began, lasted for about 30 minutes till the Godwits abandoned the field.

A Gull followed one or more foraging Godwits. When a Godwit was not able to swallow the prey immediately (in this case earth-worms), the Gull flew off, swooping, attacking and trying to force the Godwit to drop its prey. This behaviour reminded the piracy of the Black-headed Gull on the Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, frequently recorded (Tinbergen 1953, Vernon 1972, Kallander 1977).

A few meters from the Godwit, two Slender-billed Gulls *Larus genei* were present and one of them, within 3 minutes, attacked 2 Godwits in the same way as the Black-headed Gulls. The first pursuit was short, as the Godwit swallowed its prey before the Gull came near. During the second pursuit, the Black-tailed Godwit dropped the prey after a flight of about 300 meters, but the Slender-billed Gull did not take it.

The Black-headed Gull is omnivorous and frequently exhibits kleptoparasitic behaviour. During observations, the conditions were particularly favorable for kleptoparasitism, the hosts being concentrated and taking food from a fixed place, the prey being clearly visible in their bills (Brockman & Barnard 1979).

The Slender-billed Gull feeds essentially on fish and is only partially planktophagous (Insenmann 1976); therefore, feeding on earth invertebrates should not be part of its nutritional habits. Moreover, the Slender-billed Gull has not been recorded as a kleptoparasite. The observed behaviour may be variously interpreted:

- 1) Kleptoparasitism may be usual in the Slender-billed Gull, whose ecology has been poorly studied; during the observations no prey was obtained. Was observation time too short, or it was a matter of experience by the birds under observation?
- 2) Alternatively the attack of the Slender-billed Gull may be a case of “social stimulus” due to the behaviour of the Black-headed Gulls, and this may be unusual as feeding habitat.

Slender-billed and the Black-headed Gulls are often associated, especially in winter and spring (Erard 1958, 1964).

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RIASSUNTO

CLEPTOPARASSITISMO DI GABBIANO COMUNE E GABBIANO ROSEO

— Il 7 marzo 1981 dodici Gabbiani comuni *Larus ridibundus* rubavano il cibo con comportamento cleptoparassitico ad una ventina di Pittime reali, *Limosa limosa*, sulla sponda NE del lago di Fogliano (Parco Nazionale del Circeo). Nello stesso stormo erano presenti due Gabbiani rosei *Larus genei*, uno dei quali ha attaccato due diverse Pittime reali con l'apparente scopo di togliere loro la preda: entrambi i tentativi non hanno avuto esito.

— Il cleptoparassitismo è un comportamento ben noto nel Gabbiano comune, mentre non è stato mai finora rilevato nel Gabbiano roseo.

— Il cleptoparassitismo può essere una tecnica di alimentazione normale nel Gabbiano roseo, oppure può essere un caso di stimolo sociale dovuto all'associazione con i Gabbiani comuni.

RESUME'

CLEPTOPARASSITISME DE MOUETTE RIEUSE ET GOÉLAND RAILLEUR

— Le 7 mars 1981 sur le berge NE du lac de Fogliano (Parc National du Circeo) 12 Mouettes rieuses *Larus ridibundus* pillaient la nourriture avec un comportement parasitique à une vingtaine de Barges à queue noire *Limosa limosa*. Dans le même vol, il y avait 2 Goélands railleurs *Larus genei*, l'un des quels a attaqué 2 Barges à queue noire sans réussir à saisir la proie.

— Le cleptoparassitisme est un comportement bien connu chez la Mouette rieuse tandis qu'il n'a jamais été remarqué chez le Goéland railleur.

— Le cleptoparassitisme peut être une technique normale pour le Goélands railleur, peu étudié, ou bien il peut se vérifier exceptionnellement par stimulation sociale dû à l'association avec la Mouette rieuse.

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