

Black-crowned Night-herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* feeding on carcasses

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The diet of the Black-crowned Night-heron Nycticorax nycticorax is based mostly on fish, amphibians and insects, though in some populations the herons commonly take small birds. Two records are here reported of night-herons feeding on bird carcasses in the west of Badajoz Province (Extremadura, Spain). The main factor causing the absence of reports of night-herons using this food source may be the methodology traditionally used to study the diet of the species, based on the collection of food boluses or chick regurgitates but rarely on direct observation.

Key words: Black-crowned Night-heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*, food, carcasses, Extremadura.

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The diet of the Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* is based mostly on fish, amphibians, insects, crustaceans and small mammals (Voisin 1991), though small birds may on occasion constitute a significant part (Allens & Mangels 1940, Wolford & Boag 1971). In its American range this species also commonly takes eggs and young birds (Beckett 1964, Kale 1965, Collins 1970, Wolford & Boag 1971, Hunter & Morris 1976, Andrews 1981). In Spain, birds in the diet of this heron have only been reported for the Ebro Delta population, based on chicks' regurgitations

(Martínez et al. 1992). In this note I report observations of Night-herons feeding on bird carcasses, a type of food that has not previously been reported, in a heronry in the west of Badajoz Province (Extremadura, Spain).

On 05.08.96 two one-year-old night-herons were observed feeding on the corpse of a conspecific near the trees of a heronry located on the Guadiana River in Badajoz city (38°53'N-6°58'E). The colony contained Cattle Egrets *Bubufcus ibis*, Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* and Black-crowned Night-herons. At the same colony, but the next year

(08.05.97), an adult Night-heron used its bill to pick up the corpse of a young Little Egret from the ground and went into colony vegetation, presumably to eat the bird.

Necrophagy has not previously been reported in this species, though the methodology that has traditionally been used to study its diet could have precluded its detection, as the collection of chicks' regurgitates (Fasola et al. 1981, Martínez et al. 1992) or food boluses by means of neck collars (Pérez et al. 1991) are the most commonly used methods. These observations support the idea of the Night-heron as an opportunistic feeder (Wolford & Boag 1971, Fasola et al. 1981).

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RESUMEN

Martinets Nycticorax nycticorax alimentándose de carroña

La alimentación del Martinete se basa fundamentalmente en peces, anfibios e insectos, aunque en determinadas poblaciones es común la ingestión de juveniles de otras aves. Se describen aquí dos observaciones de martinets alimentándose de aves muertas en una colonia del oeste de Badajoz. El hecho de que no existan descripciones previas del uso de este tipo de alimento por parte de los martinets probablemente se debe a que la metodología tradicionalmente empleada para el estudio de la dieta de esta especie se basa en la recogida de restos alimentarios como egagrópilas o regurgitados, utilizándose raramente la observación directa.

RESUM

Martinets de nit Nycticorax nycticorax alimentant-se de carroña

L'alimentació del Martinet de nit es basa fonamentalment en peixos, amfibis i insectes encara que en determinades poblacions és comuna la ingestió de joves d'altres ocells. Aquí es descriuen dues observacions de martinets alimentant-se d'ocells morts en una colònia de l'oest de Badajoz. El fet que no existeixin descripcions prèvies de l'ús d'aquest tipus de menjar per part dels martinets probablement és perquè la metodologia emprada tradicionalment per a l'estudi de la dieta d'aquesta espècie es basa en la recollida de restes de menjar com egagròpiles o regurgitacions, utilitzant molt poc l'observació directa.

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