

## A Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* preying on adult birds

Lasse Kosonen

In the late June 1978, I heard of a Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* with exceptional feeding habits on a pond in Sorsapuisto, a small park in the centre of Tampere (61°32'N, 23°46'E). It was preying on half-tame birds living in the park, its victims including Black-headed Gulls, *Larus ridibundus*, Feral Pigeons, *Columba livia*, Jackdaws, *Corvus monedula* and even one individual of the Pygmy Hen.

I visited the park several times between 19 and 29 July. On 19 July the Gull was sitting on a small island, which was almost white with feathers and where there were several dead Black-headed Gulls. On the shore of the pond I found two dead Black-headed Gulls and one Jackdaw; their bellies were opened and the entrails had been partially removed.

When the Gull began to fly, the Black-headed Gulls on the pond (some 30–40) immediately flew up in a dense flock. However, some of the juvenile Black-headed Gulls remained swimming on the pond. The Herring Gull caught one of them in its bill, holding the victim partly under the water surface until it was lifeless. The "Killer" then dragged its prey to the island, opened the belly and began to feed. During my later visits I saw the Herring Gull kill seven juvenile Black-headed Gulls; on 23 July it even killed three in three hours! Once the gull was disturbed by people after it had wounded its prey seriously. It remained sitting on the park fence and, as soon as it was able, flew down to kill its motionless victim.

Once I saw the Herring Gull hunting a Jackdaw, which escaped by jumping nimbly into a tree. A Mallard duckling escaped by diving and people intervened to save a Feral Pigeon that had been forced by the gull into the water.

Twice I saw the Herring Gull successfully hunt Black-headed Gulls on land, but several times it was stopped by the people visiting the park. The Herring Gull was mentioned in the local newspapers, and was sentenced to death, but the police had not time to visit the park in the day, and the Herring Gull roosted elsewhere.

The adult Black-headed Gulls had obviously learned to avoid the Herring Gull by flying away in dense flocks, but the juveniles were easily caught. No Black-headed Gulls bred in the park, but juveniles arrived continuously, probably from the breeding colonies in the vicinity. However, at least one adult was killed by the gull, perhaps being one of its first victims. The park attendants removed carcasses every day, so that it was impossible to count the total number of birds killed.

This bird was not the only Herring Gull on the pond, but the only one with unusual hunting habits. The other Herring Gulls were seen to feed on the carcasses of its victims, but it was easily distinguished from them by the bloody ring around its bill! I last saw it in the mid August. During the summer of 1978 it no doubt killed several dozen Black-headed Gulls.

Herring Gulls are known to specialize in hunting a certain readily available prey (e.g. Harris 1970, Helle 1975). The victims selected by the present gull were of the size of the Black-headed Gull, whose juveniles were abundant and easy to catch. According to Kruuk (1964) the Herring Gull can be a significant egg and nestling predator of the Black-headed Gull. That predation can locally be of remarkable influence.

This kind of behaviour is probably a product of the urban environment. On the other hand, it is much more easily observed in cities. The Herring Gull was possibly

born in the city surroundings and was accustomed to the half-tame birds of cities and parks, on which it learned to prey in some phase of its life. Juvenile Herring Gulls became accustomed to the human beings more easily than older ones, and this happens in particular in areas where people feed wintering ducks (Bergman 1982). On the other hand, there are very few observations of this kind of hunting behaviour. The only observation of the Herring Gull killing the adult Black-headed Gull for food comes from Great Britain (Walker 1982).

The Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* is known to have killed the Lesser Scaup, *Aythya affinis*, and Slavonian Grebe, *Podiceps auritus* (Macdonald & Mason 1973), and there are photographs of a juvenile Great Black-backed Gull killing and eating an adult male Tufted Duck, *Aythya fuligula* (Andersson & Fridzén 1970). According to Macdonald & Mason (1973), gulls have killed larger birds when these were sick or injured, e.g. the Curlew *Numenius arquata* and American Vigeon *Anas americana*, and even congeners as the Little Gull *Larus minutus*. Cannibalism can also occur in cases of sick birds (e.g. Karhe 1971).

The method of killing migrating passerines and other birds by forcing them into the water has been recorded among Herring Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls (e.g. Edholm 1978, Järvinen et al. 1973, Karmborg 1979, Ketola 1973, Macdonald & Mason 1973, Stenroos 1970) and may be usual in gulls. At Lågskär bird station in Ahvenanmaa, Great Black-backed Gulls, Herring Gulls, Common Gulls and Arctic Skuas have been observed to prey on passerines and other birds (e.g. Great Spotted Woodpeckers and some waders) by forcing them into the water or snatching them in the air (Jörgen Palmgrén, pers. comm.).

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### Selostus: Harmaalokki täysikasvuisten lintujen saalistajana

Kesällä 1978 havaittiin lähellä Tampereen keskustaa sijaitsevalla Sorsapuiston lammella vanha harmaalokki, joka saalisti lintupuiston puolikesyjä lintuja, eniten naurulokkeja, mutta puiston siivoojien mukaan myös useita kesykyhkyjä, naakkoja ja kääpiökanankin. Kävin puistossa useita kertoja 19.7.—29.7. ja näin kyseisen harmaalokin tappavan kahdeksan kertaa nuoren naurulokin. Yhtenä päivänä se tappoi kolmessa tunnissa kolme naurulokkia. Kahta tapausa lukuun ottamatta se otti saaliinsa lammien vedestä koukkaamalla uhriaan kaulasta ja upottamalla sen osittain veden alle. Lokki raahasi uhriinsa uiden lammien saareen, hakkasi nokallaan mahan auki ja aloitti ruokailun.

Vanhat naurulokit olivat oppineet välttämään tätä "tappajalokkia" nousemalla tiheänä parvena lentoon heti kun harmaalokki lähti liikkeelle. Sen sijaan nuoret linnut, joita lammelle ilmestyi päivittäin lisää, jäivät uimaan ja olivat näin helppoja saaliita. Tosin monet saalistusyritykset epäonnistuivat häirinnän vuoksi.

Joskus harmaalokin onnistui pyydystää vanha naurulokki. Tästä oli todisteena yksi löydetty ruumis, jonka maha oli avattu. Kerran näin harmaalokin ahdistavan naakkaa, pakottavan kesykyhkyyn veteen ja hyökkäävän kohti sinisorsan poikasta, mutta nämä linnut onnistuivat pakenemaan.

Lammella oli myös muita harmaalokkeja ja ne käytivät hyväkseen "tappajalokin" saaliita, mutta eivät itse tappaneet muita lintuja. "Tappaja" oli helppo tuntea yksilöllisesti mm. namaan kuivuneen verirenkään johdosta!

Lintupuistossa käy kesäpäivinä satamäärin vierailijoita. Lokin toimia paheksuttiinkin paikallislehden yleisöosastossa ja harmaalokki saikin tappotuomion, jonka se kuitenkin vältti yöpymällä toisaalla.

Lokin poikkeuksellinen saalistuskäyttäytyminen saattoi johtua siitä, että se ehkä kaupunkiympäristössä syntyneenä oli tottunut puolikesyihin lintuihin ja oppinut käyttämään niitä ravinnokseen. Nuoret lokit tottuivat helpommin ihmisiin kuin vanhat. Toisaalta kaupunkiympäristössä tämänkaltaisen käyttäytyminen tulee helpommin havaituksi.

Harmaalokin ei ole aiemmin todettu säännöllisesti saalistaneen näin kookkaita eläimiä. Englannissa on todettu yksi tapaus, jossa harmaalokki tappoi täysikasvuisen naurulokin. Harmaalokin ja muidenkin lokkilintujen on sen sijaan todettu käyttävän hyväkseen sairaita, loukkaantuneita tai muuten avuttomia täysikasvuisia lintuja. Esim. merialueilla lokit säännöllisesti saalistavat merelle lähteviä muuttolintuja pakottamalla ne veteen tai koukkaamalla niitä ilmasta.

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## A Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* attacking a shrew *Sorex* sp. (Mammalia)

Arto Marjakangas

Yellowhammers frequently feed on oats at feeding places arranged for Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix* in winter in Finland (see Marjakangas 1981). On 9 March 1982 one of the 30 Yellowhammers present at a feeding place at Ylivieska (64°N, W Finland) was observed to attack a shrew hopping on the hard snow. The bird assailed the shrew from the air, pecked violently at the victim's neck, grasped it with its claws, and lifted it many times to a height of about 20 cm. The chase was watched through binoculars at a distance of 25 m for one minute, until the shrew managed to escape under an automatic feeder.

It is difficult to understand why a granivorous passerine should attack a small mammal so fiercely, but Yellowhammers sometimes exhibit aggression, even towards Black Grouse (Marjakangas 1981). Porkert (1981) reported that a shrew walking on the snow was attacked from the air by a female Black Grouse, and it seems that Black Grouse may occasionally catch small mammals and eat them. However, predation was hardly the reason for the present behaviour.

### Selostus: Keltasirkun hyökkäys päästäisen kimppuun

Ylivieskassa sijaitsevalla teerien ruokintapaikalla havaittiin 9.3.1982 keltasirkun hyökkäilevän lumen pinnalla

hyppivän päästäisen kimppuun nokkien ja nostellen sitä kynsissään ilmaan useita kertoja. Päästäinen pääsi lopulta karkuun. Ravinnonhankinnasta tuskin oli kysymys, vaikka Porkertin (1969, 1981) keräämien tietojen mukaan esim. teeret saattavat satunnaisesti pyydystää ja syödä pikkunisäkkäitä.

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