

Predation of a Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*, by two otters, *Lutra lutra*

Depredación de una garza real, *Ardea cinerea*, por parte de dos nutrias, *Lutra lutra*

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The Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra* (Linnaeus, 1758) is an efficient predator specialized in eating fish and crustaceans, sometimes including other prey such as amphibians, reptiles, mammals, birds and insects (Kruuk 2006). Recently, it has been reported that some piscivorous birds, including the Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea* Linnaeus, 1758), have been observed accompanying otters while they are feeding, in a clear association in which the heron benefited from feeding opportunities provided by otter behaviour (Mougeot & Rodríguez 2019). But this relationship is not without risk if one of the predators is able to prey on the other. This note describes a case of predation of a grey heron by two otters.

The observation happened on 15/02/2023 in the city of Burgos, near the Besson bridge (UTM: 30T 441880/4687570). At 7:49 am, one of us (ER) could see an otter swimming through the vegetation on the right bank of the river and a grey heron that flew from a nearby islet and landed in the water. At 7:50 h the heron was observed trying to fly away, but something was holding it back from inside the water. Two otters grabbed the heron and dragged it into the river, trying to sink it. Soon, one of the otters managed to bite the heron's head, at which point the heron became immobile and appeared to be dead. The grey heron was dragged by the head up to the islet, where they stopped watching each other, without being able to specify the final outcome of the interaction. The different size of the two otters suggests that they could be a female and a cub. The scene was captured on video with a mobile phone (video: <https://youtu.be/qnYEZgoADCw>).

Several cases have been described where otters have fed on piscivorous birds, such as Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (Linnaeus, 1758), gulls (Laridae) and at least one case where the remains of a grey heron were interpreted as having been eaten by otters (Ruiz-Olmo & Marsol 2002, Charles de la Hey 2008). However, all cases refer



Frame from the video showing the two otters (1 and 2) trying to drag the grey heron (3) to land.

to analysis of droppings and remains found on riverbanks, so it cannot be known whether they were predated or scavenged (O'Sullivan *et al.* 1992). The observation described in this note is direct evidence of predation on one of these species.

References

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