

## Korta rapporter – *Short communications*

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### **Commensal use of Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* by Common Coot *Fulica atra* and of Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* by European Wigeon *Anas penelope***

*Sothöns Fulica atra kommensala utnyttjande av knölsvanar Cygnus olor och bläsänders Anas penelope utnyttjande av kanadagäss Branta canadensis*

HANS KÄLLANDER

It is well known that various waterbird species may associate with Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* and Bewick's Swans *C. columbianus bewickii*, benefitting from the swans' feeding activities (Bauer & Glutz von Blotzheim 1968, Merilä & Ohtonen 1987, Källander 2005). Thus, Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Tufted Duck *A. fuligula* and Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clanga* dive under the swans, and an experimental study has recently shown that Common Pochards thereby may double their intake rate (Gyimesi et al. 2012). Dabbling ducks such as Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* and European Wigeon *A. penelope*, but also Common Coot *Fulica atra*, regularly associate with these two species of swan. They swim, mostly behind the swans, and peck pieces of plant material from the surface. Mute Swans *Cygnus olor*, however, usually seem not to be attended by these commensals (but see Beven 1980).

In one study (Källander 2005), 41% of 558 Whooper Swan individuals and 56% of swan

groups had attendant commensals. Corresponding figures for Bewick's Swans were 51% and 71%, but sample sizes were much smaller (25 and 38, respectively). For Mute Swans, however, only 2.6% (N = 1481) had commensals and mostly for a very short period of time. This difference in attractiveness of the swan species seems to depend on their different feeding methods and diets. Both Whooper Swans and Bewick's Swans "foot-paddle", i.e. use their feet to stir up bottom mud in order to expose the nutritious tubers on the rhizomes of fennel pondweed *Potamogeton pectinatus* (Sherwood 1960, Nolet et al. 2002). Mute Swans, in contrast, usually do not foot-paddle and feed mostly on other types of plant material (Bauer & Glutz von Blotzheim 1968). In August 2012, it was therefore quite surprising to find a group of Common Coots at Lake Krankesjön, southern Sweden (55°42' N, 13°28' E), closely attending a pair of feeding Mute Swans.

The swan pair was feeding close to a bird observation tower on the southern shore of the lake and the coots were closely associated with them (Figure 1). Closer examination showed that these two swans were food-paddling, but it is uncertain what kind of food they were taking. Clearly, however, they stirred up plant fragments on which the coots fed. The coots were attentive to the behaviour of the swans and although swimming around the swans, most of the time they kept behind them. Also, when a swan's neck and head surfaced, they kept a safe distance to the swan only to advance towards it when it again submersed its head. The number of coots varied constantly from just one or two up to ten. When the swans ceased feeding, the coots immediately left them. The fact that I have spent many hundreds of hours at Lake Krankesjön during the last eight years counting and observing waterbirds without ever before having noticed the described association, suggests that it either is very uncommon or that it only occurs in specific situations.



Figure 1. Common Coots using Mute Swans commensally, Krankesjön 14 August 2012.  
*Sothöns utnyttjande knölsvan kommensalt, Krankesjön den 14 Augusti 2012.*

During studies of commensal associations between Common Goldeneyes and European Wigeons with Whooper Swans and Bewick's Swans on the northern coast of the Falsterbo Peninsula (55°26' N, 12°52'30" E) in November 1994, a commensal association of European Wigeons with Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* was also observed. Out of 24 Canada Geese seen on 3 November, seven had associated Wigeons and on 19 November, out of 350 geese, 23 (6.3%) had Wigeons attending them. Although relatively few Canada Geese were attended by Wigeons, this association is a bit surprising considering that Canada Geese seem to forage more like Mute Swans than like Whooper Swans or Bewick's Swans, but clearly the geese made food particles available to the ducks. Wigeons have also been reported to use Brent Geese *Branta bernicla* commensally (Bauer & Glutz von Blotzheim 1968).

As an aside, on 30 November Canada Geese were themselves using Whooper and Bewick's Swans: seven swans had one or two Canada Geese pecking items from the surface behind them.

## References

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## Sammanfattning

Flera arter simfåglar associerar sig med sångsvanar *Cygnus cygnus* och mindre sångsvanar *C. columbianus bewickii* och drar nytta av dessas födosök

(Bauer & Glutz von Botzheim 1968, Merilä & Ohtonen 1987, Källander 2005). Gräsand *Anas platyrhynchos*, bläsand *A. penelope* och sothöna *Fulica atra* utnyttjar uppvirvlat material på vattenytan, medan knipa *Bucephala clanga*, vigg *Aythya fuligula* och brunand *Aythya ferina* dyker in under de födosökande svanarna. En nyligen publicerad experimentell studie (Gyimesi m.fl. 2012) har visat att brunänder härigenom kan fördubbla sitt näringsintag per tidsenhet. I en studie (Källander 2005) hade ungefär hälften av 583 sångsvanar och mindre sångsvanar associerade simfåglar (nästan uteslutande bläsänder) mot endast 2,6% av 1381 knölsvanar *C. olor*. Denna skillnad tycks bero på svanarternas olika förosöksmetod: sångsvanen och mindre sångsvanen "fot-paddlar" i bottenmaterialet för att exponera lagringsknölar på borstnatens *Potamogeton pectinatus* rhizomer, medan knölsvanen sällan tycks "fot-paddla" och lever av andra submersa växter (Bauer & Glutz von Blotzheim 1968). Det var därför något förvånande när jag i augusti 2012 fann en grupp sothöns, vilken nära associerade sig med ett knölsvanpar och pickade uppvirvlat material från ytan (Figur 1). Antalet sothöns i anslutning till en svan varierade, fåglarna höll sig företrädesvis bakom svanarna och simmade undan en smula när svanarna drog upp halsen, blott för att omedelbart simma fram igen när svanhalsen på nytt försvann under ytan. De hundratals timmar jag räknat och observerat simfåglar på Krankesjön under de senaste åtta åren utan att tidigare ha noterat någon kommensal associering med knölsvan tyder på att den sannolikt är relativt ovanlig.

Under studier av kommensalt utnyttjande av svanar på nordsidan av Falsterbohalvön hösten 1994, upptäcktes att bläsänder också i viss utsträckning utnyttjade kanadagäss *Branta canadensis*. Sålunda hade den 19 november 23 av 350 (6,3%) kanadagäss bläsänder, som utnyttjade dem. Iakttagelsen är en aning förvånande, eftersom kanadagäss verkar födosöka mer som knölsvan än som sångsvan och mindre sångsvan, men bläsänder har också rapporterats utnyttja prutgäss *Branta bernicla* (Bauer & Glutz von Blotzheim 1968).

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## Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* prey on newt

*Stenskvätta Oenanthe oenanthe tar salamander som byte*

MICHAŁ CIACH

The diet of Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* is composed with invertebrates – mainly arthropods (insects and spiders), earthworms, and snails – and a much smaller fraction of plant material. Information on vertebrate prey is exceptional (Cramp 1998) and only a single record of Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* intake has been noted (Grössler 1959).

On 7 April 2012 in the Ustrzyki Dolne town (Carpathians, SE Poland) I saw a unique behaviour of Northern Wheatear. On a meadow a group of four birds (three females and one male) were foraging. While watched, one of the females attacked a newt (Figure 1.). The bird stroke the prey against the ground several times, handling its head or tail (Figure 2.). Having difficulties in prey managing (or due to observer presence), the bird flew ca. 200 meters with the prey in its bill and landed on the ground, where it finished the consumption. The entire time of prey handling and consumption was about five minutes. The observation was conducted at noon, in good, cloudless and windless weather.

The observation described in this note is the second record of a Northern Wheatear foraging on a vertebrate and also the first record an amphibian was seen to be part of the diet of this species. Four species of newts are recorded in southern Poland (Juszczyk 1987, Głowaciński & Rafiński 2003). The prey species was difficult to determine. However, based on size and coloration it probably was Common Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris* or Carpathian Newt *Lissotriton montandoni*.

The diet of several Wheatear species occurring in arid or semi-arid regions may occasionally include vertebrates – small lizards and geckos (Cramp 1998). However, to prey on newt by Northern Wheatear is surprising in light of what is known about the diet of this species. Northern Wheatears arrive in Poland at the end of March and singles or small groups of birds are seen in a variety of habitats, e.g. on plowing fields and meadows (Tomiałojć & Stawarczyk 2003). The use of vertebrates by Northern Wheatear may be related to the cold spring weather, when ectothermic (cold-blooded) species leaving hibernation shelters are