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NOTA

An apparent instance of predation on a Yellow-billed Cardinal *(Paroaria capitata)* by the Chopi Blackbird *(Gnorimopsar chopi)*

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RESUMO: Um evento de provável predação de um cavalaria *(Paroaria capitata)* pela graúna *(Gnorimopsar chopi).* Relato aqui um aparente evento de predação da graúna (*Gnorimopsar chopi,* Icteridae) sobre um indivíduo imaturo de cavalaria (*Paroaria capitata,* Emberizidae) observado no Pantanal, Mato Grosso do Sul. Com bicadas vigorosas, um indivíduo adulto de graúna retirou e comeu porções de carne da nuca do indivíduo de cavalaria recém morto. Este é o primeiro registro de predação de aves pela graúna.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Icteridae, predação sobre ave, Pantanal.

KEY-WORDS: Icteridae, predation on a bird, Pantanal.

New World blackbirds (Icteridae) have a diverse diet that includes arthropods (mainly insects), fruits, seeds, and nectar, whereas vertebrates are seldom eaten (Jaramillo and Burke 1999). Predation upon vertebrates is more pronounced, or at least more documented, in neartic species, especially grackles (*Quiscalus* spp.) and blackbirds in the genus *Euphagus* (Davidson 1994, Jaramillo and Burke 1999). Among South American species, oropendolas (*Psarocolius* spp.) occasionally ransack bird nests looking for nestlings and may prey on juvenile birds (Wolf 1971, Sick 1997). In a recent review of vertebrate predation by Neotropical passerines, Lopes et al. (2005) listed 13 icterid species with vertebrate remains (mainly frogs, lizards, and bird's eggs and nestlings) in the stomach, including *Amblyramphus holosericeus, Cacicus* spp., *Chrysomus cyanopus, Icterus* spp., *Psarocolius* spp. and *Quiscalus* spp. Although these records most likely represent true predation, carrion consumption cannot be ruled out because most of the records were based on stomach contents and not on actual observations of predation events.

The Chopi Blackbird *(Gnorimopsar chopi)* is a gregarious species with a wide geographic range in South America and favors open areas for foraging (Jaramillo and Burke 1999). Although it forages both on the ground and in trees, ground foraging is most common (Jaramillo and Burke 1999).The diet of Chopi Blackbirds is poorly known but it has been observed eating fruits and arthropods (Sick 1997). Rosendo M. Fraga (pers. comm. 2006) observed a Chopi Blackbird eating a small frog.

On 12 September 2006 I observed a Chopi Blackbird feeding on a recently dead immature Yellow-billed Cardinal (*Paroaria capitata,* Emberizidae) at the grounds of the Base de Estudos do Pantanal (BEP; 19°34'S, 57°01'W) located at the margin of the Miranda River in the Pantanal floodplain of Central Brazil, State of Mato Grosso do Sul. The dead cardinal had the light brown head typical of immature birds (Sigrist 2006). Apart from a few attempts to pluck the breast feathers off, the blackbird concentrated at the back of the head of the cardinal, where it pecked vigorously and swallowed small fleshy portions in the way similar to that reported for *Quiscalus quiscula* (Davidson 1994). While the bird fed, two other chopi blackbirds remained nearby. After ca. 10 min, the eating blackbird was disturbed by a pedestrian and left the carcass. Close inspection revealed that the cardinal (22.6 g) was still warm. There were no wounds on the body of the dead bird other than those on the back of its head.

Although I did not witness the blackbird attacking the cardinal, predation is highly probable as a local resident told me that he saw a group of 2-3 blackbirds chasing and attacking an immature cardinal two weeks earlier. Some icterids may eat carrion (*e.g., Quiscalus major;* Jaramillo and Burke 1999), but it is unlikely that this was the case of the present report, as the cardinal's carcass was clearly fresh.

The BEP staff provides a daily food supply that attracts dozens of birds, a circumstance that may have favored the predation by putting the predator and its prey

in close proximity to each other. Moreover, the predation event occurred at the peak of the dry season in the Pantanal floodplain, when food resources for birds are usually scarce (Ragusa-Netto 2005 and references therein). The suggestion that low resource availability may have induced the blackbird's predatory behavior reported here is strengthened by previous reports of predation on birds by Rusty Blackbirds *(Euphagus carolinus;* Orians and Angell 1985), and similar behavior in grackles and oropendolas, which constitute two of the five main icterid lineages (sensu Lanyon and Omland 1999; see also Freeman and Zink 1995). Among grackles predation on birds is recorded across different clades, including those that lead to *Quiscalus, Euphagus, Gnorimopsar,* and possibly *Agelaius phoeniceus* (Helms 1962). To my knowledge, this is the first report of predation on a bird by the Chopi Blackbird, thus adding to the increasing knowledge of predatory behavior in icterids.

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