

A probable case of intraspecific killing in Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*)

Because documented reports of intraspecific killing amongst wild birds are very scarce, particularly in instances away from the nest or breeding territory, all additional observations merit publication (Lombardo 1986, Flux & Flux 1992).

At 1230 hours (NZDT) on 25 February 1992 I witnessed a group of Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) chasing and attacking one of their own species at Armers Beach, Kaikoura Peninsula, South Island. The incident began when one bird was chased and harassed for several minutes by four others before being caught, pinned down and aggressively set upon. The victim was held down by one attacker who stood on its back and kept a tight hold of its neck. Simultaneously, the other three attackers pecked at the victim's head, bill, eyes, wings and tail. The commotion attracted about 25 other Turnstones that were feeding nearby. These birds formed a circle of onlookers and a number tentatively joined the attack when the opportunity arose. However, none became as active as the four principal attackers and most showed only a passing interest, returning to feed after a couple of minutes.

The victim initially resisted the attacks and repeatedly attempted to escape. At one point, it managed to break free and take flight, but was forced down into the sea. It then swam several metres to the closest rocks, but was immediately set upon as it tried to struggle ashore. Following this, the victim became exhausted and covered behind a rock, unable to continue resisting its attackers. At this point I intervened and rescued the bird. It was clearly in danger of being killed. The whole episode had lasted eight or nine minutes.

The victim and the four principal attackers were all adult turnstones assuming breeding plumage; most of the others were birds in non-breeding plumage. South Island Pied Oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*), Variable Oystercatchers (*H. unicolor*), Banded Dotterels (*Chgaradrius bicinctus*), Siberian Tattlers (*Tringa brevipes*) and Red-billed Gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae*) were feeding in the vicinity but showed no interest whatsoever.

Although taken into care and given food and warmth, the victim did not recover from the attack and died about 10 hours later. On inspection, it was found to be a female in very poor condition: It weighed only 64.2 grams and was so badly emaciated that its sternum was poking through the skin of the breast. Turnstones caught in Victoria, Australia, weighed, on average, 100.3 grams in January, 118.0 grams in mid-March and 170.2 grams in early April, just prior to migration to the Northern Hemisphere (Huston Barter 1990). There are no figures available for late February, but Turnstones in breeding plumage at this time of year should be expected to average almost twice the weight of the Kaikoura bird.

As there was apparently plentiful food available in the area, yet the victim was in such poor condition, I speculate that it was probably diseased prior to the attack. I cannot speculate as to why the other Turnstones attacked it and would almost certainly have killed it if I had not intervened. The

purpose of this note is simply to put a further incidence of probable intraspecific killing on record and I leave it to others to theorize as why this behaviour occurs.

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Nankeen Night Herons (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) on the Whanganui River

On 17 February 1994, while on a survey for native fish in the Whanganui River, I observed five Nankeen Night Herons (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) take flight from willows beside the wharf at Pipiriki (39°33' S; 175°05' E). One was in adult plumage and four were mottled immature birds. While travelling downriver for about 8 km, I saw three more Nankeen Night Herons take flight, of which one was an adult and two were immatures. These birds flew a short distance up-river. A further kilometre downriver, another heron was observed sitting on a dead willow branch. This bird was in adult plumage and had a white plume along its nape. Throughout the summer, Nankeen Night Herons were reported as far downstream as the Ahuahu Stream confluence with the Whanganui River and Kemp's Pole, some 80 km south of Pipiriki. The maximum number seen in one group was ten, over a 1 km stretch of river.

No sightings were made of Nankeen Night Herons during May and June. When the willows that border the river had lost their leaves, a search was made by boat for likely nests, but this proved unsuccessful. On 5 December 1994, four Nankeen Night Herons were seen in the Jerusalem area. A local farmer reported that they were on his property during the previous winter. From the river, I saw birds flying from this property in the evening. Several birds were filmed on video and photographs have been