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SHORT NOTE

Observation of an attack on a mature song thrush (*Turdus philomelos)* by a black-backed gull (*Larus dominicanus)*

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At 0730, 14 Sep 2007, a southern black-backed gull *Larus dominicanus* was observed struggling with a mature song thrush *Turdus philomelos* on a road within the Massey University campus, Albany, New Zealand. It is uncertain how the gull obtained the thrush as the initial attack was not observed. There were no vehicles moving around the area or parked in the car park. The thrush was a mature bird and was struggling on the ground as the gull held it with 1 foot and its bill. There were other thrushes feeding in the surrounding grassed areas.

The gull quickly subdued the thrush, flipped it on its back and commenced pulling out large clumps of breast feathers. It then sliced into the flesh of the thrush's breast. Feather removal and devouring of the flesh happened within 3 minutes of our first noticing the attack. The gull continued to devour the bird until it was disturbed by a pedestrian walking within 5 m of the gull. The gull then picked up the thrush in its bill and flew towards an area of forest and estuarine wetland, where it was lost from sight. The area where the attack took place was strewn with feathers and small pieces of flesh and fat.

Black-backed gulls are 1 of the largest avian predators around the coasts and inland areas of New Zealand. They have been observed preying on the eggs and chicks of seabirds (Cook 1977, Heather & Sibson 1958) and feeding on shellfish and finfish (Brunton 1978). They also attack newborn lambs (Oliver 1955, Mark Seabrook-Davison, *pers. obs*.) and have been observed preying on tuatara (*Sphenodon punctatus*) at Stephen's Island (Oliver 1955). Being opportunistic feeders (Heather & Robertson 1996), they will also feed on carrion.

It is likely that the thrush observed here was directly attacked by the gull. Parker (2007) observed a similar feeding event by an Australian magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* on a blackbird *Turdus merula* in the same area as this observation. Parker (2007) concluded that the magpie had either killed the blackbird directly or had scavenged a recent death. As the thrush in this observation was struggling to get away, we suggest the thrush was directly depredated by the gull which clearly saw the thrush as potential prey.

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