

## Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) kleptoparasitising Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*)

### Stare (*Sturnus vulgaris*) als Nahrungsschmarotzer bei Kiebitzen (*Vanellus vanellus*)

By Hans Källander

**Key Words:** *Sturnus vulgaris*, *Vanellus vanellus*, kleptoparasitism

#### Summary

KÄLLANDER, H. (1988): Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) kleptoparasitising Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*). Ecol. Birds. 10: —.

Starlings kleptoparasitising Lapwings had a success rate of 60%. The parasitism closely resembled that of Black-headed Gulls except that the Lapwings sometimes behaved aggressively towards the Starlings.

#### Zusammenfassung

KÄLLANDER, H. (1988): Stare (*Sturnus vulgaris*) als Nahrungsschmarotzer bei Kiebitzen (*Vanellus vanellus*). Ökol. Vögel 10: —.

Stare, die bei Kiebitzen schmarotzten, waren zu 60% der Angriffe erfolgreich. Abgesehen vom aggressiven Verhalten der Kiebitze gegen die Stare war das Schmarotzen der wohlbekannten Lachmöve/Kiebitz-Assoziation sehr ähnlich.

The widespread kleptoparasitic association between Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* and plovers, notably Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus*, has been described by KÄLLANDER (1977, 1979) and analysed in detail by BARNARD & THOMPSON (1985). In the present note I describe a strikingly similar situation where Lapwings were again the victims whereas the parasites were European Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*; the latter are themselves quite often the victims of Black-headed Gull parasitism.

On 2 September 1987 some 500 Lapwings were foraging on a newly sown field, situated on sandy soil about 20 km to the east of Lund, southernmost Sweden. Foraging Lapwings were scattered with fairly long inter-individual distances all over the field. A number of Starlings also foraged in the same field; some of them forming small groups, others foraging solitarily among the Lapwings. Although they also used other feeding methods, such as »gaping« and wiping the bill sidewise through the top soil, these Starlings were constantly surveilling the feeding activities of the surrounding Lapwings and their self-feeding activity was low. From time to time they would run or, more often, fly towards a Lapwing that had discovered an earthworm and attack it. Out of 25 kleptoparasitic attempts where the outcome could be confirmed, the Starling obtained the worm in 15 (60%), usually after an aerial chase of varying length. Attacks were launched from anything between one and 20 m, some started even before the worm that the Lapwing had discovered had become visible (cf. KÄLLANDER 1977).

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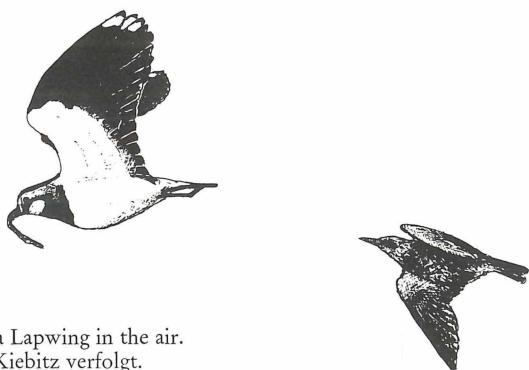


Fig. 1. Starling chasing a Lapwing in the air.  
Abb. 1. Star, der einen Kiebitz verfolgt.

The Lapwings showed several types of aversive behaviour: (i) during foraging they would often try to move away from nearby Starlings; (ii) they would sometimes attack them; on several occasions Lapwings were seen flying towards Starlings, forcing them to retreat a couple of metres; (iii) one Lapwing threatened back when attacked by a Starling and one Starling, after having launched an attack from a distance of 20 m, stopped 50 cm short of the Lapwing which swallowed a large worm without interference; (iv) at more than half of the attacks the Lapwing tried to escape by flying away with the worm, which was not a very successful tactic except when the worm was small; (v) twice Lapwings were seen trying (unsuccessfully) to regain their worm.

In all respects, except that Lapwings sometimes fought back, the kleptoparasitism closely resembled that of Black-headed Gulls on Lapwings. The similarity included the sometimes long and winding aerial chases (Fig. 1), which mostly ended in the Lapwing dropping the worm. Despite having spent many hours in the field studying kleptoparasitism by Black-headed Gulls against both plovers and Starlings I have only recorded casual attempts by Starlings to steal food from plovers. I therefore conclude that the behaviour is quite rare, at least as the dominant feeding tactic. ULFSTRAND (1959) reports having observed it once, but without presenting any details. Starlings should engage in this activity only if it results in a higher net energy intake than other feeding methods. Although not measured, under the prevailing conditions the rate at which Lapwings discovered worms appeared to be higher than that at which Starlings foraging for themselves did. In this connection it could be worth pointing out that also a lot of intra-specific kleptoparasitism occurred between the Starlings, often involving long aerial chases.

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