

American Coot and Ring-billed Gull feeding under duck droppings.—At Lake Eola, near Orlando, Orange County, Florida, on 8 April 1981 I observed American Coots (*Fulica americana*) and Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*). One of the coots attracted my attention late in the day as it quartered the grassland near the water's edge, a favorite resting place for many tame Muscovy Ducks (*Carina moschata*). The shore in places was covered by their dried and dark colored droppings, pressed into the grass by visitors to the lake. The coot pulled the droppings and with some vigor levered them away and extracted edible items. From where I was watching, only a few meters away, it seemed they were picking up seeds, which were quickly swallowed. This food-seeking behavior continued for about 35 minutes before the coot sought the lake.

An immature Ring-billed Gull followed the feeding American Coot. In prizing the duck droppings apart, the coot revealed areas of rotting yellowish grass underneath. The gull, by trailing a little behind the coot, was able to pick up and swallow small wriggling earthworms as well as beetles and other insects from the patches. The prey, suddenly being in the sun's rays, scurried about but were soon captured. When the coot ceased its feeding activities, the Ring-billed Gull also departed.

I had not previously encountered such reactions to droppings either by American Coots nor by Coots (*F. atra*) in England. That birds are known to investigate excreta was well illustrated to me in the village of Mousehole, Cornwall, England on 2 March 1979 when I saw a Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) feeding on the soft greenish-white excrement of a *Larus* gull on a concrete path. By probing at it and by turning its head sideways, the wader was able to pull away most of the material (King, 1982, British Birds 75:88). In England I have seen cattle droppings investigated by House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), Magpies (*Pica pica*), Jackdaws (*Corvus monedula*), Rooks (*C. frugilegus*), Carrion Crow (*C. carone*) to name but a few, and by insect-feeding passerines, which are commonly drawn to such material.—BERNARD KING, 'Gull Cry', 9 Park Road, Newlyn, Penzance, Cornwall, TR18 5DZ, England.

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EDITORIAL

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