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NOTES

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KLEPTOPARASITISM OF GREAT BLUE HERONS BY AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS

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Reported kleptoparasitism or food piracy by the American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) has involved pelicans taking fish from Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), gulls, or other pelicans (O'Malley and Evans 1983, Anderson 1991, Evans and Knopf 1993). All but one of the instances cited are of swimming pelicans stealing prey. Here we describe examples of aerial kleptoparasitism by White Pelicans of Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*).

Florida has experienced below normal rainfall since early spring 1998. As a result, water levels in many lakes in peninsular Florida are well below average. Numbers of White Pelicans wintering in fresh water lakes in Florida have increased in recent years. Approximately 1,200 White Pelicans spent January and February 2001 on Lake Jackson, in Osceola County, feeding on the fish left stranded as the water level declined. On 21 February MJF observed and videotaped several White Pelicans engaged in aerial kleptoparasitism of Great Blue Herons on Lake Jackson (Fig. 1). Great Blue Herons were the target of kleptoparasitism by White Pelicans in only 1 of 36 attacks observed by O'Malley and Evans (1983). Over a period of an hour MJF observed 2 pursuit episodes where 3-4 pelicans chased a Great Blue Heron. During the first episode, the pelicans gave up 1 minute into the chase when the heron swallowed the fish that it was carrying in its bill. During the second chase, as 1 of the pelicans approached within 1 m (about 12 s into the chase), the heron dropped its fish. The pelican that had approached closest to the heron was able to land and scoop up the fish. It was remarkable to see White Pelicans (mass of 5.4-9.0 kg, Evans and Knopf 1993) outmaneuver and bully the much smaller and, one would suppose, more agile Great Blue Heron (mass 2.2-2.6 kg, Dunning 1993).



Figure 1. White Pelicans in aerial pursuit of a Great Blue Heron, 21 February 2001 Osceola County Florida, just before the heron gave up the fish it was carrying.

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