AN INTERSPECIFIC INTERACTION BETWEEN A EUROPEAN STARLING AND A GREEN-WINGED TEAL

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On 22 October 1995, we observed with a 15X-45X zoom spotting scope an aggressive attack by a European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) towards a female Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) on the Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge, Washington Co., Mississippi. Approximately 30 Green-winged Teal and 2500 European Starlings, Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), and Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) were observed on an exposed mud flat of a moist-soil wetland. Waterfowl often used the wetlands throughout the day, while the mentioned passerines were abundant in the morning and evening, en route to and from a nearby nocturnal roost.

We saw an individual European Starling hover near the rear of the Green-winged Teal and begin to tug at the duck's rectrices. Neither the first nor the second tail pull elicited a response from the teal. However, during the third tail pull the teal turned it's head towards the starling, opened and closed it's bill, then poked at the starling, resulting the

starling taking flight and leaving the immediate area. On previous days, European Starlings and Red-winged Blackbirds were observed chasing, in flight, groups of shorebirds such as Least Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla*) and Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*). However, physical contact was not observed until the observed European Starling and Green-winged Teal interaction.

We suggest two explanations for this interaction. First, the European Starling may have been defending a small area that it had been using to bathe, drink, or forage. Interspecific competition has been demonstrated as an important factor affecting winter bird populations (Davis 1973). In addition, concentrations of large numbers of birds may increase levels of competition (Witter and Swaddle 1995). Second, this interaction may have been a foraging attempt. Mud or aquatic vegetation on the duck's tail may have appeared as a food item, accessible with little effort, to the starling. However we did not notice, from our position and distance, any debris on the ducks tail. European Starlings have been reported to kleptoparasitize other passerine species and often these attacks are associated with behaviors such as pursuing hosts over short distances and rushing at hosts while on the water (Brockman and Barnard 1979). The starling behaviors we observed are similar to those reported by Brockman and Barnard (1979), although there was no resource evident that the starling might have been attempting to acquire.

Acknowledgments

We thank Dr. W. Marvin Davis for his suggestions and review of this note as well as sharing his enthusiasm and expertise of bird watching and ornithology.

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