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Opportunistic predation by a Great Blue Heron on an American Dipper.—Although most wading birds feed primarily on fish, their diets frequently include other prey, including aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, and other birds (Cogswell 1977, Kushlan 1978). There are accounts of Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) capturing and eating birds, including Black Rails (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) (Evans and Page 1986), phalaropes (genus *Phalaropus*) (Packard 1943, Merrifield 1992), and hatchling Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*) (Chapman and Forbes 1984). Most observations were made in marsh or estuarine habitats where densities of other birds is relatively high. Here I describe an observation of a Great Blue Heron preying on a solitary American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*) along a mid-size river in northern California.

This observation took place at approximately 12:00 h (PDT) on 27 August 1992 at the South Fork Eel River where it flows through the Northern California Coast Range Preserve in northern Mendocino County, California (39°44'N, 123°39'W). I first observed an adult heron standing near the river margin in an area upstream of a large, shallow pool where a portion of the river flows among several large, emergent boulders. The heron was partially obscured by a thick clump of sedges. While observing the heron through binoculars (8×) from a distance of approximately 50–60 m, a dipper landed on an emergent boulder 2–3 m from it. The heron immediately turned its head in the direction of the dipper. After “dipping” several times while walking around the top of the boulder, the dipper slipped into the river in an area where the flow was approximately 30–50 cm·sec⁻¹ and the depth was 12–15 cm. Within a period of approximately 5 sec the heron took two rapid steps in the direction of where the dipper entered the river, extending its neck and lowering its head close to the water surface. Shortly thereafter it made a powerful lunge, submerging its head and the upper half of its neck into the river, and emerged with the struggling dipper grasped in its beak. Over a period of 2–3 min the heron manipulated the dipper in an attempt to swallow it. Several times while holding the dipper in its beak the heron shook its head violently up and down and from side to side, each time readjusting its grasp on the dipper. Three times during this period the heron completely submerged the dipper in the river. Shortly after the dipper stopped struggling (approximately 1.5–2 min), it was ingested head first, a process that took approximately 10 sec. Approximately 4–5 min after ingesting the dipper, the heron flew out of sight downstream. There was a noticeable bulge in the heron’s neck during this time.

To my knowledge, this is the first reported observation of Great Blue Heron predation on a dipper. Moreover, this observation illustrates the highly opportunistic nature of predation by Great Blue Herons in general: as stated by Kushlan (1978) “Somewhere, sometime, individual wading birds have probably eaten just about any item that they could swallow.”

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