

## An Unusual Case of Aggression by a Fish-owl

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**Abstract.** On May 31st 1986, while observing a pair of Blakiston's Fish Owls (*Ketupa blakistoni*) in their breeding territory, I witnessed a unique encounter between the male owl and a Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*). The Black-crowned Night Heron is very rare in Hokkaido. It does not breed there (WBSJ, 1981), and in fact was not recorded there at all by WBSJ (1982), although OSJ (1974) does mention records from that prefecture. The early summer of 1986 saw an unprecedented invasion of herons and egrets of several species in southeastern Hokkaido (Brazil, in press) and clearly a single night heron arrived during this influx. Since, in Japan, the fish owl is confined to the island of Hokkaido, and now mostly to the eastern third, it is highly unlikely that these two species have encountered each other in this country before. The ranges of the two species do not overlap in the Soviet Union either (Flint *et al.*, 1984).

On May 31st the pair of fish owls began a long bout of calling just after dusk at 19:00 hrs. They were interrupted by the call of a Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*). At C 19:30, after calling once or twice, it appeared calling in flight over the river. It passed very close to the female fish owl which was on the ground beside the river attempting to catch a fish at the time. The male owl immediately left his perch in a tall tree on a bank overlooking the river and flew in to attack. The owl, despite its huge size, proved extremely agile on the wing. It closed to within three metres of the night heron and appeared to nearly catch it twice before it escaped by flying off up river. The female owl was apparently unaffected by the night heron's presence and the male owl returned to his perch.

On the 9th June the night heron was again in the territory, this time it flew over calling just before 21:00. Both owls were under observation at the time. They were perching close to each other in the same tree that the male had used on 31st May, and were engaged in a lengthy bout of calling. On this occasion they showed no reaction at all to the night heron's presence.

Interspecific aggression, as opposed to predation, is rarely observed, although studies of the prey remains of owls have shown that it does occur between them. Mikkola (1983) lists nine species of owls which have preyed on other owls, but includes no records of large owls attacking other, similarly sized birds, intruding in their territory. That, in this case, the fish owl attacked the night heron suggests it may have mistaken it for another individual of its own species, a fact made possible by their similarity in size. Alternatively, in view of its unusual call and size, the owl may have simply reacted to the heron as an unwelcome intruder. The reason for the attack on the first

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occasion, but not on the second, may have been as a result of the close proximity of the night heron to the female fish owl. Fish owls have also been known to attack Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) which invade their territories (S. Yamamoto pers. comm.).

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#### シマフクロウの例外的な攻撃行動

1986年5月31日、北海道東部のシマフクロウの繁殖なわばり内で、シマフクロウの雄がゴイサギを攻撃したのを観察した。ゴイサギの記録は、調査地内では初めてであり、それ以前に両種が出会った可能性は少ない。6月9日に再びゴイサギがなわばり内に侵入したにもかかわらず、シマフクロウの雄はゴイサギを攻撃しなかった。最初の出合い時にシマフクロウの雄は、ゴイサギを同種のなわばり内侵入と見間違えたと考えられる。

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