

Short Communication

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* captures and drowns a Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

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Abstract - A Yellow-legged Gull catching a Feral Pigeon, flies to a nearby small lake and kills him drowning. This behaviour can be explained or with higher cognitive ability, related with the use of innovative methods, or with a generalist behaviour that offers the opportunity to use new techniques.

Key words: Yellow-legged Gull, techniques of predation.

Riassunto - Un Gabbiano reale *Larus michahellis* cattura e annega un Piccione urbano *Columba livia*.

L'osservazione di un Gabbiano reale che, dopo aver catturato un Piccione urbano vola presso un vicino specchio d'acqua e lo uccide affogandolo, può essere spiegata o con le elevate capacità cognitive, correlate con l'utilizzo di metodi innovativi, o con un comportamento generalista che offre l'opportunità di utilizzare nuove tecniche.

Parole chiave: Gabbiano reale, tecniche di predazione.

Some species of large gulls adopt predatory behaviour against other bird species (e.g. Spaans, 1971; Vidal *et al.*, 1998; Nietlisbach *et al.*, 2014; Skórka *et al.*, 2014). In the Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* complex this technique is used in urban habitats also against Feral Pigeons *Columba livia* (van Zurk, 1978; Vincent & Guiguen, 1989; Bon, 1999). On 28th May 2014, inside the Bioparco, Rome Zoo, located in the centre of Rome (central coordinates 41°54'N - 12°29'E), one of us (AC) observed and filmed an adult Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* which captured a Feral Pigeon. The prey, held tightly in the bill from the gull, struggled violently trying to get rid. The gull took off a short flight, alighting on the water of a nearby little lake. The pigeon was kept immersed until drowning, then the gull approached the shore to feed on the prey. Similar observations were also carried out in Trieste (Benussi, *pers. comm.*). Young (1987) have described

a comparable behaviour against rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* at the Jersey Zoo, Jersey, Channel Islands. The use of this innovative feeding behaviour can be justified to the brain size, which is related to the innovations performed (Overington *et al.*, 2009), or to the generalist behaviour, which increases the opportunities for the application of new techniques (Ducatez *et al.*, 2014).

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