KLEPTOPARASITISM OF IMPERIAL CORMORANTS *PHALACROCORAX ATRICEPS* BY GREATER SHEATHBILLS *CHIONIS ALBA* IN ANTARCTICA

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On 3 February 1995, while carrying out a study on the foraging behaviour of the Imperial Cormorant *Phalacrocorax atriceps* at Duthoit Point, Nelson Island, South Shetland Islands, Antarctica, I observed Greater Sheathbills *Chionis alba* kleptoparasitizing breeding cormorants which were feeding their chicks. The robbing behaviour consisted, as described for Greater and Lesser Sheathbills *C. minor* on penguins (Jones 1963, Burger 1979, 1981), in attacks running or flying against the cormorant just as a bolus of food was passed from the adult to the chick, producing an interruption of regurgitation and the spilling of some food, which was seized by the sheathbill. During the study six breeding pairs of cormorants were followed for 24 hours, observing a total of 42 chick feedings (M. Favero *et al*. unpubl. data), from which three (7%) were kleptoparasitized, involving one, two and four attacks, respectively. Success was observed only in the second case mentioned.

Greater Sheathbills have been cited robbing penguins (see Brockmann & Barnard 1979, Furness 1987, Marchant & Higgins 1993 for review) but never Imperial Cormorants, despite the fact that the association between sheathbill and cormorant colonies has often been noted (e.g. Watson 1975, Olrog 1984).

During the observations the mass of the cormorant chicks averaged 2820 g (SD=210 g, n=11) which means they were 38–50 days old. Two additional 24-h observations were made at the same colony in early December (during the cormorant incubating period) and late January (brooding period). No robbing behaviour was observed, although individual sheathbills were seen walking, looking and occasionally taking dropped food among the cormorant nests.

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