

**Kingfishers *Halcyon capensis* and *Alcedo atthis* and Pond-Heron
Ardeola bacchus Associating with Otters *Lutra perspicillata***

In November–December 1992 we carried out a study of the ecology of three species of otter in the Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, W. Thailand. On 25 November at 0800 h, whilst observing a party of three smooth-coated otters *Lutra perspicillata* at Khao Bahn Dai, in the southern part of the sanctuary, we noticed three birds in close attendance of the otters: a Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis*, a Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and a Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus*. The otters were foraging mostly in the stream, but also on land in a narrow belt of reeds at the edge of the Huai Kha Khaeng, which is about 12 m wide there. Outside of the reeds the river was shallow, fast flowing over sand, and the two Kingfishers repeatedly dived successfully from perches at fish which were disturbed by the otters and which escaped into the open water over the sands. The Pond-Heron landed on open places on the bank close to the otters, flying to and fro over the animals, once darting after and catching what was possibly a small frog, on land.

The observation lasted about 12 minutes, whilst the otters foraged over a distance of about 150 m. The birds were in constant attendance of the otters, and the association was striking especially because there were not many kingfishers and herons present along the river. The Stork-billed Kingfisher is resident in the area, but the Common Kingfisher and the Chinese Pond-Heron are winter visitors (LEKAGUL & ROUND, 1991).

Similar commensal associations between birds and carnivores have been reported for other species, such as Chanting Goshawks *Melierax musiens* feeding on rodents and insects disturbed by honey badgers *Mellivora capensis* in southern Africa (MARLOW, 1983, SKINNER & SMITHERS, 1990), and Chinese Pond-Heron commonly feed on insects disturbed by grazing herbivores. In Kenya the dwarf mongoose *Helogale undulata* forages in packs which are accompanied by hornbills *Tockus flavirostris*, *T. deckeni* and *T. erythrorhynchus*, as well as the White-crowned Bush-Shrike *Eurocephalus anguitimens*, the drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* and the Lilac-breasted Roller *Coracias caudata*, all feeding on large insects disturbed by the mongooses, and the mongooses benefitting from the presence of the birds which warn when potential predators approach (RASA, 1983). Common factors in these observations are that diurnal predators, mustelids or viverrids, stir up prey which they cannot catch themselves, but which can be utilized by birds with opportunistic foraging behaviour.

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