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## STRONG AGONISTIC REACTION OF TERRITORIAL MALE BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula* AGAINST ITS SELF-IMAGE

### Močna agonistična reakcija teritorialnega samca kosa *Turdus merula* proti lastni podobi

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In spring, high level of testosterone in males induces the vigorous territorial behaviour and song production (CATCHPOLE & SLATER 1995). However, birds usually try to avoid direct agonistic interactions, since they can cause serious injuries. Therefore, territorial males communicate with threat postures and song rather than with the direct attacks (GILL 1995). Usually, both visual and vocal stimuli are important for an aggressive male to attack.

However, on 17 Apr 2006 I observed, at Hrastje near Modraže in NE Slovenia (UTM WM53), a 2Y male Blackbird attacking his self-image in a mirror, although no vocal communication was present (Figure 1). The bird was constantly attacking the mirror through the whole day. When scared, it flew away, but was soon back again repeating its attacking behaviour



**Figure 1:** Strong agonistic reaction of 2Y male Blackbird *Turdus merula* against its self-image, recorded on 17 Apr 2006 at Hrastje near Modraže in NE Slovenia (UTM WM53)

**Slika 1:** Močno agonistično vedenje drugoletnega samca kosa *Turdus merula* proti lastni podobi v ogledalu, opaženo dne 17.4.2006 v Hrastju pri Modražah (SV Slovenija; UTM WM53)

(Figure 1). I made a small experiment and placed a predator dummy, a stuffed Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*, to see if mobbing or predator-induced behaviour would prevail over social or territorial behaviour as known in some other bird species, e.g. Arabian Babbler *Turdoides squamiceps* (SOMMER & MUNDY 2005). At the beginning, the territorial Blackbird inspected the dummy, but later continued with attacks on its own image. When the mirror was removed, the bird came back several times to search for the “intruder”.

The search lasted for approximately 15 minutes, and then the male engaged in singing or vocal display. The case shows that the territoriality in mating season can induce, at least in some males, strong agonistic reaction to intraspecific intruders. There is a question, however, whether this is a general phenomenon or is just restricted to some more aggressive or young males establishing their territories.

### Povzetek

Opazovanje drugoletnega teritorialnega samca kosa *Turdus merula*, ki je 17.4.2006 v zaselku Hrastje pri Modražah (UTM WM53, SV Slovenija) silovito napadal lastno podobo v ogledalu. Z agresivnim vedenjem ni prenehal niti tedaj, ko mu je bila nastavljena lutka penilca, nagačena lesna sova *Strix aluco*. Napadati je nehal šele po odstranitvi ogledala. Primer kaže na močne agresivne odzive teritorialnih samcev v gnezditveni sezoni, zato bi bilo v prihodnje koristno preveriti, ali se pojav kaže le pri nekaterih osebkih ali gre za splošen pojav.

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## THE NUMBER OF SPANISH SPARROW *Passer hispaniolensis* NESTS IN THE NERETVA DELTA (S DALMATIA, CROATIA)

### Število gnezd travniškega vrabca *Passer hispaniolensis* v delti Neretve (J Dalmacija, Hrvaška)

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The Neretva delta region has probably played an important part in the expansion of the Spanish Sparrow, as this was the source area from where these birds colonized north Dalmatia and the islands further away in the late 1970's (LUKAČ 2004). Relying on his own data and literature reports on only 353 known nests in South Dalmatia, LUKAČ (2004) estimates the amount of Spanish Sparrows breeding in the region at around 3,500 – 19,000. As there is little information about Spanish Sparrows breeding in the Neretva delta (KRALJ 1996), it is important to publish as much data about the number of breeding pairs as possible.

Between 3 – 10 Apr 2006, we travelled several times from Metković to Lake Kutina. Along the 11 km long road between Bijeli Vir and Kutina, a total of 263 Spanish Sparrow nests were counted (no nests were found in Dubravica and Kosa). The distribution of the nests was as follows: in Bijeli Vir (YH16) 186 nests in 21 poplar trees *Populus* sp., and 2 in 1 willow *Salix* sp. In Mlinišće (YH16) 21 in 1 plane tree *Platanus* sp., 14 in 1 mulberry tree *Morus* sp., and 28 in 4 willows. In single poplars in Mislina (YH16), Badžula (YH16, YH15) and Kutina (YH15), 2, 7 and 3 nests were found, respectively.

The number of these nests (263) provides information on the breeding period of the previous year (2005). In case some of the breeding pairs built new nests for the second clutch, that meant somewhat less pairs. However, it is not known how many of the nests were lost during the winter, and how many of the nests were overlooked by the observers. Also, a certain number of nests inside the colonies might have been used by other sparrow species (*Passer domesticus*,