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# Red-winged Blackbird Attempts to Drown Common Yellowthroat

by William Moskoff and Jeffrey O. Sundberg

Aggressive behavior takes many forms in birds, but only rarely does it involve an attempt by one individual to drown another. Great Crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*) engage in fights with conspecifics during courtship, when establishing territory, and when defending young, which can lead to the dominant competitor grabbing its weaker opponent by the head or neck and attempting to pull it under water (Cramp and Simmons 1977). Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) will similarly jump on a weaker opponent and try to force it underwater, biting and pecking at the head and neck (Cramp and Simmons 1977). But there does not appear to be a description in the literature of interspecific aggression where an individual attempts to drown a member of another species.

We here describe an apparent attempt by a male Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) to drown a male Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*). On 19 May, 2002, at approximately 12:30 p.m. at the Burnham Prairie in southern Cook County,

Illinois, a male Red-winged Blackbird flew out of a stand of Common Reeds (*Phragmites australis*) and attacked a flying male Common Yellowthroat by knocking it into the water about 15-20 m from the reeds. As the yellowthroat struggled in the water, the blackbird pecked at it and then began to attack with its feet, using them to push the yellowthroat underwater. At one point, only the head of the yellowthroat was visible. For several seconds, the yellowthroat thrashed about in the water while the blackbird continued the attack. The yellowthroat struggled to get its wings above the water surface and eventually did so, regaining flight. In addition to being quite wet when it took flight, the yellowthroat's feathers were not laying normally, although it seemed to fly without difficulty. The blackbird flew back into the reeds without giving further chase. There is reason to believe that the attack was an actual drowning attempt rather than just a more traditional fight that happened to take place over water. The blackbird was making a definite attempt to