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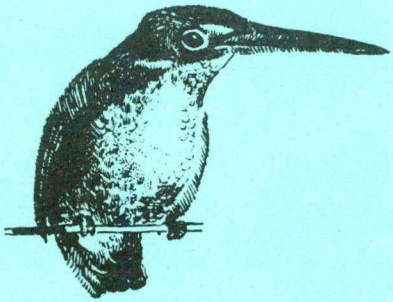

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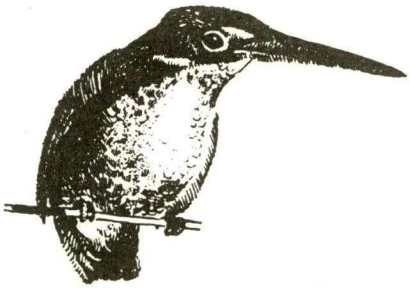

Vol. 16 No. 4 June, 1982

VOCAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE GREY BUTCHERBIRD AT TURRAMURRA, NEW SOUTH WALES

D. LARKINS

INTRODUCTION

From 1972-74 a study was made of the Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* at South Turramurra NSW (Larkins 1979, 1980). It was originally intended to use colour bands to identify the individuals of the pair holding the study territory, but one bird had a tuft of disarranged flank feathers which quickly identified it, particularly when the bird appeared in silhouette. This bird could often be recognized without the need for binoculars and its behaviour during courtship established it as the male bird. In listening to the pair calling it was realised that some of the calls could be written down in musical notation. This was done quickly in the field and the transcribed musical notes of the butcherbirds' contact calls showed that male and female uttered individual motifs that allowed the birds to be recognized by their sex even when they were out of sight. Hooker and Hooker (1969) used the same method to study antiphonal singing in Tropical Bou-bou Shrikes *Laniarius aethiopicus.*

This paper is an attempt to describe and comment on the vocalisations of the study pair.

SONGS AND CALLS

There are difficulties in trying to define what is song and what are calls. In this paper Thorpe's definition (1961) has been taken as a guideline: "Song is primarily under the control of sex hormones and is in general concerned with the reproductive cycle . . . It is thus a form of sexual display. Call notes . . . are concerned with the co-ordination of the behaviour of other members of the species. "Some sounds have been classed as calls because of their very quiet nature, although as they appear during breeding they are probably under the control of hormones."

1. SONG

(a) BREEDING SONG

The first indication of breeding was the increased intensity of the pair bond. This was evident when the male and female birds began to share a perching tree at night (fig. 1). Each morning about first light the Turramurra pair offered specific calls from their night roosts as

first sound for the day, and it was observed that while at the winter solstice they were not sharing a night perch, they came to roost in the same tree early in July. In 1973 breeding song was first heard on 25 July, eleven days after the birds came to share a roosting tree at night.

There was a brief interval between the first specific call for the day and the notes of breeding song. This is partly explained by the male having to make his way from the night perch to the singing tree (fig 1). The singing tree grew in a backyard, across a road from the rest of the territory (Larkins 1979), far removed from the roosting tree on the east side of the territory.

The breeding song has a tonal quality superior to all other butcherbird sounds. It was very difficult to be sure the singer was only the male bird. This was because these early morning observations were made between first light and sunrise in the forest, and the bird had to be tracked when it left the roosting tree and moved through the trees to take up its perch in the rather inconveniently placed singing tree in a backyard. It was possible to approach the singing tree by walking down a right-of-way. This approach was supervised by several householders' dogs which were very alert so it was decided to watch for the return of the singer by waiting in the clear space at the edge of the road. When it was possible to identify the birds by male/female calls, it was found to be the male bird that returned from the singing tree to rejoin the female waiting in the bush.

Breeding song is produced very softy at first. Each morning it becomes louder, consisting of two principal phrases, used alternately and repeated many times. Day by day the period of singing lengthens, and the intensity of the sound increases until the song lasts for about twenty minutes. Then the sound gradually diminishes in quality and volume until cessation early in November.

Sometimes from near the singing tree it was possible to hear the breeding song uttered by the butcherbird in the adjoining territory, and the singers would almost certainly hear one another. Once, after the male in the study territory had rejoined the female from his singing tree, I was able to locate them immediately in the tree fork where they later built a nest. This led to the conclusion that in addition to being a form of sexual display and an advertisement of territory, breeding song may stimulate the female to choose a nest site, perhaps while the song is being uttered. The lack of light so early in the morning made it impossible to establish this conclusively.

Autumn "breeding song", sung during the day from a high tree (not the singing tree), and produced at low volume, has been noted in the study territory and elsewhere. Possibly this has led to the claim that butcherbirds call best in the autumn. Nice (1943) quotes Tinbergen (1939) in stating "with some species at least, autumn singing is regularly accompained by testis development. This development nearly always regresses before full maturity is reached, but some individuals actually begin a new reproductive cycle". This may explain an observation of out of season breeding by Grey Butcherbirds in North (1906).

(b) ADVERTISING SONG

The territory is held all the year, being fiercely defended in the breeding season when advertising song is produced. In the 1972 season, when it was positively established the birds were a new pair (Larkins 1979) the territorial boundaries were advertised by both birds and this made it possible to map the territory and calculate its area at 4.5 ha. It was notable that this boundary advertising did not take place to the same extent in 1973–74, when it was looked for as an indication that breeding was underway. In fact, the sharing of the roosting tree was a more reliable indication that breeding had commenced than the evidence of territorial posting.

The territorial boundaries are advertised by both the male and female singing their individual motifs alternately from a high tree. The production of the phrases proceeding so quickly that it is easy to mistake the total sound as having been produced by one bird. This alternation of sound between the pair is sometimes referred to as "antiphonal" singing or "duetting". Thorpe (1972) surveys the literature on duetting and antiphonal song, notes there are 32 or

more families in which it is known to occur. He classifies four types of duet singing, and of these the study pair of Grey Butcherbirds practise that known as "antiphonal" where the phrases of each bird alternate and do not overlap or occur in unison.

The advertising or antiphonal singing of Grey Butcherbirds is made up of contact calls sung very loudly and may include, or commence with, the specific call sung by either bird. Advertising is mostly offered when both birds are perched at the top of a high tree. One bird may initiate singing when the partner has food in its beak. The instinct to join in the singing causes the second bird to respond to the first phrase by singing "with its mouth full". Examples of phrases used in combination as advertising or antiphonal singing at Turramurra are tabled (fig. 2). Those without a knowledge of musical notation should follow the patterns of the notes to recognize differences between the calls.

The motifs of individual birds vary very slightly from one territory to another. E. Wreford Chandler (1971) has described this, and Cobb, then Government Pathologist in the NSW Department of Agriculture, says (1897): "Witness the comic responsive duet of the Australian Butcherbird and his wife. Says he, 'What do you drink when you go on a drunk?' 'Water, water,' invariably responds his wife, with an ironical and very comical upward inflection. 'Oi'll tell yer father,' says he in a rich brogue, upon which she calls for 'Quarter, quarter.'"

The imagination would have to be stretched to interpret the Turramurra birds' vocalisations in such a way! In fact, because of variation in dialect, a knowledge of the male/female songs in one territory does not mean that male and female will be immediately recognized by their song motifs in every location. A study of the sound patterns used by each pair of birds is necessary for this.

(c) QUIET SINGING

This term is used here to describe both "whisper song" and "sub-song".

There is considerable literature on this subject and the various definitions and explanations for the phenomenon are rather confusing. Briefly, quiet singing refers to songs that are sung at less than normal volume, when the singer is relaxed.

Quiet songs are sung by both adult and immature Grey Butcherbirds, but there is a distinction between the phrases offered by adult and immature birds. Adult birds at Turramurra sang quiet songs from low branches after the young had left the nest, or after failed nests were not followed by new clutches. Both male and female adults sang these quiet notes, heard at intervals from the end of one breeding season until the beginning of the nest, but more often in late summer and early autumn. In quiet singing adult birds alternated Grey Butcherbird calls with imitations of the calls of other birds in the territory. Although they included Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* and Eastern Rosellas *P. eximius,* Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita* and Galahs *C. roseicapilla* were left out. Very occasionally a species not in the study area was imitated. This can perhaps be explained by the calls of these birds sometimes carrying from neighbouring bush very clearly on cold mornings, or by the butcherbirds having heard the calls during periods of juvenile wandering.

By the middle of March the adult male of the study pair included motifs from the breeding song in his quiet singing. These were sung more loudly than the rest of the notes but not as loudly as the same song at the height of breeding. Very rarely a few notes burst out at breeding song volume. This only happened for about two weeks either side of the autumn equinox.

Immature birds observed in quiet song did not imitate other birds. These were young birds still unskilled when calling at normal volume, their notes having poorer tonal quality than adult sounds. Once an immature bird in quiet song introduced part of a breeding song.

Grey Butcherbirds are relaxed in quiet singing. The adult birds were noticed to prefer a low sheltered branch, the feathers were ungroomed (fluffed), and this supports Chisolm's

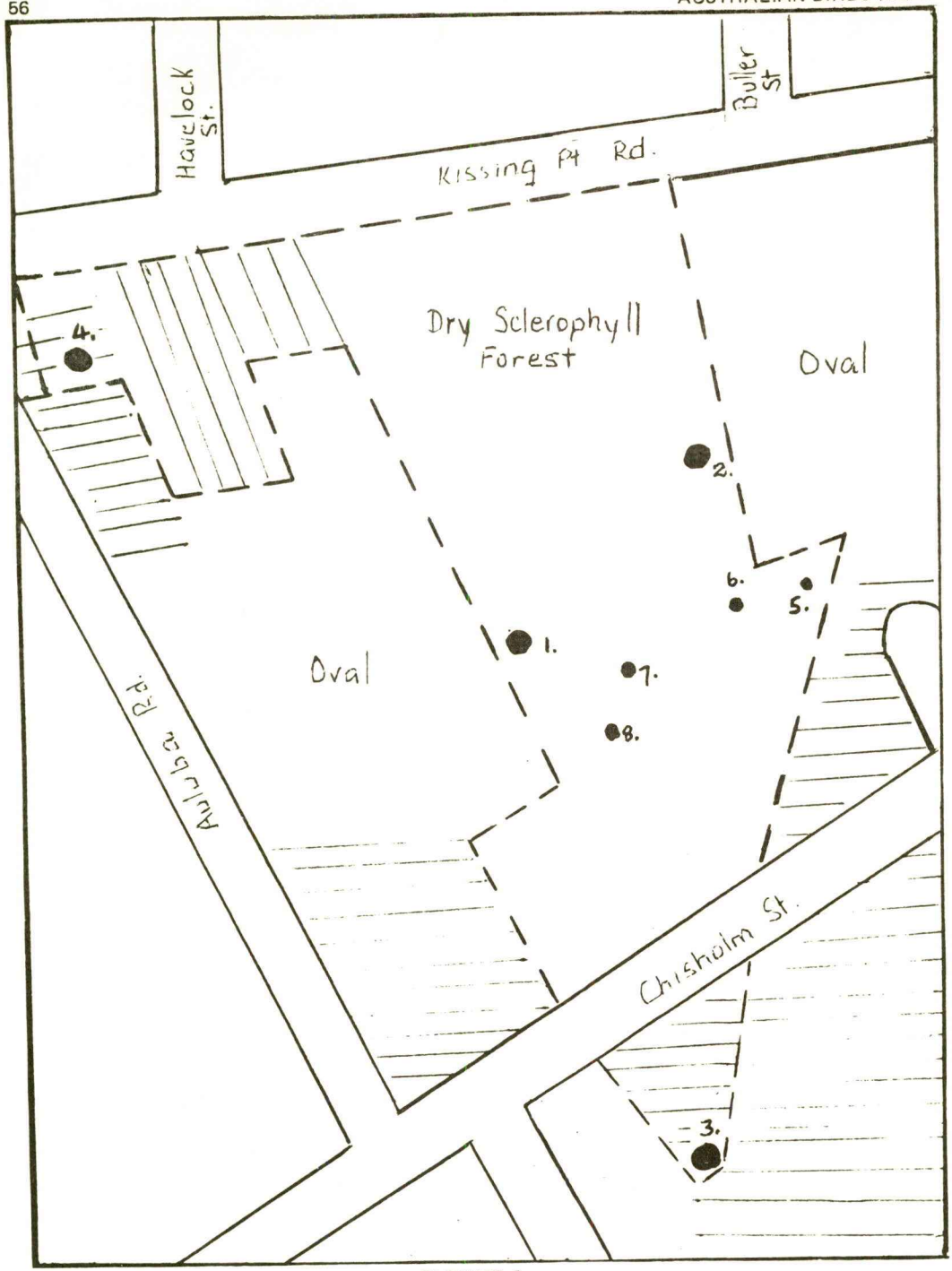

FIGURE 1.
MAP OF GREY BUTCHERBIRD TERRITORY TURRAMURRA NSW

Key.

– – – Boundary of territory
1. Roosting tree 1972
2. Roosting tree 1973-4
3. Singing tree each year
4. Autumn singing tree each year
5. Original nest 1972
6. Re-nest 1972
7. Nest 1973
8. Nest 1974

Hatched areas are residential

view (1946) that a bird may be gaining some pleasure from its own singing. Certainly Hartshorne (1958) thought "Avian singing in this fashion has some analogy to a human musical performances, in which the performer amuses himself", and he later comments on our dread of anthropomorphism, although, "we believe . . . that man is a further development of tendancies found also in lower orders".

2. CALLS

(a) SPECIFIC CALL

This is the first sound for the day, uttered from the night perch. The study birds also used the specific call with a slight variation, adding some gusto to the song, and sometimes included it as one of the advertising motifs. The specific call is too complex to transcribe into musical notation, but this is the call by which we can immediately recognize the Grey Butcherbird, irrespective of regional variations in dialects. It is often the last call of the day.

(b) CONTACT CALLS

These are the same song patterns used in combination to make up advertising song, but the notes are sung with less volume and tempo when used as contact calls. The cryptic nature of Grey Butcherbirds and the dry sclerophyll habitat they prefer, with its underlayer of shrubs, results in the need for the species to communicate with calls to say, "Here I am" and "Where are you?" The contact call seems to have no other function than this.

While the range of contact calls introduced as advertising is limited to a few phrases, contact calls also include a range of more conversational phrases which are not easy to reproduce as musical notation.

(c) ATTACK CALLS

These are loud harsh sounds delivered by either bird to both mammalian and avian intruders that venture to close to the nest. Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae* and Australian Ravens *Corvus coronoides* are driven off by attack calls and aggressive flights and beak claps. During incubation and early nestling mature humans approaching the nest are intimidated by aerial attacks with harsh calls and beak clapping. The intensity of the attack wanes after several fly-pasts, or after a direct hit.

(d) ALARM CALLS

i. Overhead alarms.

Although the study birds reacted with spirited Advertising Song to neighbouring Grey Butcherbirds that came close to the territorial boundaries along Kissing Pt. Rd. (fig. 1), no alarms to overhead predators were noted. Other species in the territory, in particular Noisy Miners *Manorina melanocephala* reacted most urgently to Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* which are seen from time to time along the Lane Cove River Valley. The butcherbirds reacted to these alarms by turning their heads to a lateral position to better view the Peregrines. Once the male, feeding in an open position, looked at a Peregrine in this way and then silently flew to shelter in a thick bush. Another time, the female, brooding, put her head into the lateral position to inspect a Peregrine overhead, but stayed on the nest. She also looked at aircraft on the approach to Sydney Airport in the same way.

ii. Ground alarms.

Ground alarms or "Querks" signal a cat or a goanna, or may indicate a possum or an owl in a tree hollow. They may be very persistent and annoying.

(e) PRE-PERCHING or SLUMBER SONG

During nest building there was little sound production late in the day, but some low, almost inaudible warbles, with preening, shaking of plumage and beak wiping, were noticed immediately before the birds' inspection of the roost. Both male and female made these soft calls. This behaviour was noted during nest building only in 1972 when the newly formed pair chose a low night perch near the nest site. The behaviour could occur in seasons when a high night perch is used, but it is not easy to see in failing light and was only recorded near the low night roost in the first behaviour of the pair varied from that of the first year and the male butcherbird did not pay so much attention to his mate after 1972 when the pair was first formed. Some aspects of this will be discussed in a later paper.

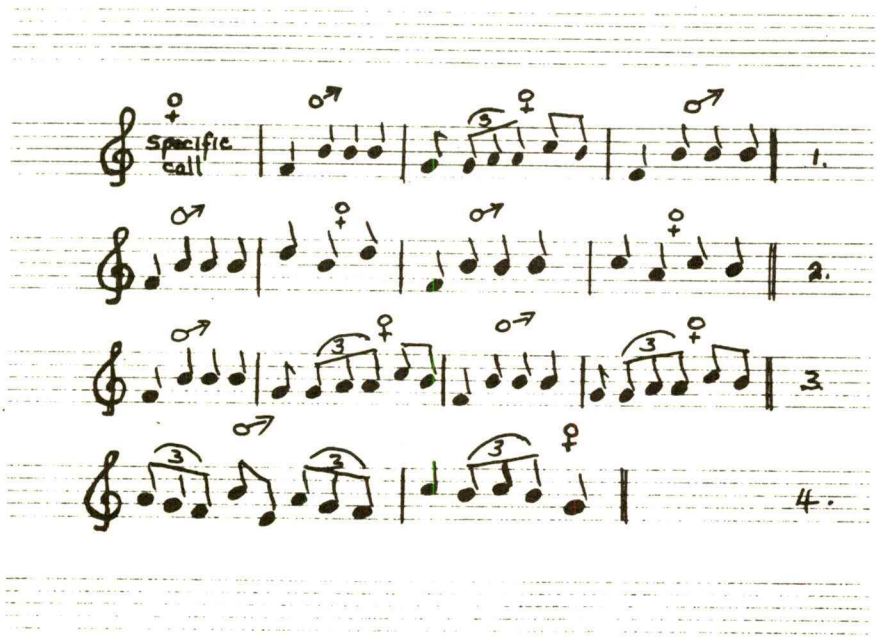

Figure 2

Examples of advertising song and contact calls between a pair of Grey Butcherbirds, Turramurra NSW.

Key.

1. Advertising led by female using specific call.
2. A common advertising exchange led by male.
3. Contact calls as female leaves nest to wedge a mouse skull that the pair have stored in a tree.
4. Male to female who is brooding.

(f) FOOD BEGGING

During courtship display the female adopts a supplicating attitude, standing on the ground with wings raised but slight drooped and quivering. She may beg softly to be fed by the male, or the begging calls may be loud and intense, the sound then being similar to the food begging calls of young birds. Food begging calls are also made by the female during brooding, when she is fed on the nest by the male.

(g) GROUND CHUCKLES

These were noted only in 1972 on the day nest building was completed. After the first specific calls for the day, the pair flew down from the night perch into the understory of fern, pea bush and wattle. Subdued chuckling sounds were heard but the nature of the understory prevented any observation of behaviour. This behaviour did not appear to relate to copulation which took place after intensive courtship displays of food begging and aerial chases.

(h) GOOD OFFERING

Adults bringing food to very young nestlings may croon very softly to the young. As nestlings mature their own food begging calls are audible to the observer and are similar to those of young Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen.*

CONCLUSION

Although North (1906), Keast (1965) and Pizzey (1981) make a slight distinction between the plumage of adult male and female Grey Butcherbirds, the sexes are difficult to seperate by plumage in the field. A close knowledge of the sounds produced by a pair of birds, facilitates the study of the species. There are variations in dialect and a knowledge of calls in each territory is therefore needed to distinquish the sexes aurally.

There was evidence that territorial positing, or advertising, by a newly established pair

There was evidence that territorial posting, or advertising, by a newly established pair was more intense in the first year; in 1973-4 some aspects of behaviour varied from the first observations of the newly paired birds in 1972, and these will be discussed in a later paper.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people kindly assisted during the three years of this study, and these have been acknowledged in my initial paper. In addition, Prof. W.H. Thorpe of Cambridge University wrote to me at long length on the subject of antiphonal singing, and generously sent a list of references including that N.A. Cobb (1897). For this I was very grateful.

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SEASONAL CHANGES IN RAPTOR NUMBERS NEAR SYDNEY. NEW SOUTH WALES

S.J.S. DEBUS

INTRODUCTION

Recorded fluctuations in numbers of birds at a given locality can provide evidence of movement into or out of the area. This is true of raptors, which lend themselves well to this sort of investigation. The following analysis is based mainly on the personal records of other Cumberland Bird Observers Club members and a few of my own. The area covered is roughly the County of Cumberland, comprising mainly the Sydney urban area and hinterland and the Hawkesbury Swamps. The period covered is 1968–1980, and the data obtained are tallies of sightings. Such counts can also indicate the relative abundance of species, allowing for difference in habits and conspicuousness.

METHODS

Observers simply noted the date, locality and number of birds seen during bird watching activities or in casual observation. The total number of sightings for each species in each season was obtained, by pooling the seasonal figures for each year. One record is taken as one individual seen on one day. A systematic approach amenable to statistical analysis was not possible because of the nature of the data. The figures are necessarily rough and illustrate trends only.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table I shows the seasonal tallies for the more frequently seen species (those with few records have been omitted). There may be inherent bias in the results. It is common knowledge among local bird watchers that autumn and winter is the best time to see raptors, therefore observers may be looking especially for raptors at this time. However bird watching effort is probably fairly constant through the year.

The results suggest a marked influx into the area during the cooler months, and departure in spring, of the Black-shouldered Kite, Whistling Kite, Swamp Harrier, Brown Goshawk, Little Eagle, Australian Kestrel and Brown Falcon. For many of these, the number of sightings varies by a factor of two or three (or more) over the seasons. Sea-Eagle numbers appear fairly constant, suggesting that this species is resident. Figures for the remaining species are inconclusive, but most suggest a minor increase during the non-breeding months. The Collared Sparrowhawk appears to leave the area for the winter, following a peak in numbers in autumn (possible passage at this time?). The results also suggest that the most abundant raptor species in the Sydney area are (in order) Black-shouldered Kite, Kestrel, Brown Goshawk and Brown Falcon.

The value of such analyses is greatly increased if the data are gathered in a systematic way. It is desirable for the number of sightings to be correlated with a standard measure of recording effort, e.g. observation time or distance travelled. A standard approach deserving wide adoption is that suggested by Baker-Gabb (1981 *Aust. Raptor Assoc. News* **2 (1)**, 78): measured route (e.g. about 50 km) should be travelled regularly (say once a month) at a speed of not more than 50 km per hour, and all raptors (or other species) seen are recorded, noting age and sex where possible. Travel should begin by 08:00, and be undertaken on calm, rain-free days. Results can be expressed as km per bird, thus enabling direct comparison between seasons, years and different localities. If pursued for years, such regular surveys may also reveal long-term trends in population levels. This is becoming increasingly important as raptor populations face various threats to their existence.

TABLE I.

Number of raptor observations in the Sydney region 1968-1980, by season.

Species	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus notatus*	156	302	496	234
Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus*	27	87	68	19
White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*	40	40	51	47
Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans*	14	28	36	12
Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrhocephalus*	14	16	4	6
Brown Goshawk *A. fasciatus*	44	123	107	42
Grey Goshawk *A. novaehollandiae*	2	3	8	2
Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquial audax*	10	10	9	7
Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides*	20	23	25	12
Australian Kestrel *Falco cenchroides*	125	155	345	131
Brown Falcon *F. berigora*	28	82	174	36
Australian Hobby *F. longipennis*	50	50	37	29
Peregrine Falcon *F. peregrinus*	11	13	16	9

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I am most grateful to Athol Colemane for supplying his voluminous records and those of others. This paper would not have been written but for his desire to make use of the data. Thanks are also due to the many other CBOC members who submitted their records. Ms S. Spence typed the manuscript.

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SOME RECORDS OF THE OLIVE–BACKED ORIOLE AND SPANGLED DRONGO MIMICKING OTHER BIRD'S CALLS

GREG P. CLANCY

The Olive-backed Oriole *Oriolus sagittatus* is generally recognised as a mimic of other bird's calls (Frith 1976, Chisholm 1948). Despsite this, the performance of an adult bird at Iluka on 3 August 1980 was rather astounding. It imitated 13 calls that were easily identified as well as two or three that could not be definitely identified. The call of the White-eared Monach *Monarcha leucotis* was thought to be one of the latter. The Oriole interspersed its mimickry with bursts of its own call. The bird calls imitated were those of the following: Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus funereus* (which does not occur at Iluka), Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus,* Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala,* Eastern Rosella *Platycercus eximius* (two calling at once!), Scaly-breasted Lorikeet *Trichoglossus chorolepidotus,* Lewin's Honeyeater *Meliphaga lewinii,* Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla harmonica,* White-cheeked Honeyeater *Phylidonyris nigra,* Figbird *Spheotheres viridis,* Little Wattlebird *Anthochaera chrysoptera,* Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris,* Eastern Whipbird *Psophodes olivaceus,* and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae.*

From May 1979 to June 1981 individual Orioles were observed at South Grafton where they were heard to imitate up to four other species of birds at any one time. The calls mimicked were those of the Black-faced Cuckooshrike, Blue-faced Honeyeater *Entomyzon cyanotis* (a favourite), Noisy Miner, Rufous Whistler, Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus,* Grey Butcherbird, Australian King Parrot *Alisterus scapularis,* White-throated Honeyeater *Melithreptus albogularis* and Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis.*

Alec Chisholm (1946) asked about the Oriole "Is mimickry constant among birds of this species? The indications are that it is not, for several observers who know the species well have failed to detect imitations in its calls. Sound evidence regarding the Oriole's mimetic ability, however, has been given by a number of ornithologists, notably P.A. Gilbert, who records having heard an individual bird in springtime using the notes of nine forest-dwelling species, including the migratory Koel Cuckoo. E.A.R. Lord's remark on the species is that he has heard it render 27 separate calls (other than its own), all being used in a 'running whisper-song'. Ellis McNamara, too, has a high opinion of the Oriole's skill as a springtime mimic. He tells me that he regards it as ranking next to the Lyrebird and Heath-Wren among the mockers of his district."

The Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus* is not mentioned by Frith (1976) or Slater (1974) as a mimic however Chisholm (1948) includes the species as an occasional mimic. On 21 April 1978 a Spangled Drongo landed on a television antenna at South Grafton and began to mimic the Blue-faced Honeyeater. At Iluka on 29 July 1979 a Drongo was mimicking the Noisy Miner, Blue-faced Honeyeater and Little Wattlebird. On 5 August 1980 a Drongo at Grafton was heard to imitate the calls of the Pied Butcherbird and Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen.* They were mimicked so effectively that it was thought that a Pied Butcherbird was actually present until a closer inspection revealed that the calls were coming from the Drongo. Alec Chisholm (1946) states "I have heard a Drongo imitate cleverly the cry of a Goshawk, and a resident of tropical Queensland actually has credited the bird with using the call of a Butcherbird in order to cause a Magpie-lark to drop the food it was carrying."

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of A.R. McGill and A.K. Morris who provided the references to earlier mimickry by these species.

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A BLACK-BREASTED KITE AT ILUKA, NEW SOUTH WALES

GREG P. CLANCY and JOHN H. YOUNG

At 0915 hours on 21 March 1981 a large raptor was observed soaring over the eastern edge of the Iluka township situated near to the mouth of the Clarence River. At first glance the bird appeared to be about the size of a White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster,* but would have been slightly smaller. It glided in a westerly direction which allowed its shape and colour to be seen more clearly. The short squared tail, the broad-fingered wings, the prominent black streaking on the breast and the most obvious character, the broad white "bullseyes" in the wings were all apparent. It was identified as a Black-breasted Kite *Hamirostra melanosternon.* Its general colour was noticeably darker than the illustration in P. Slater (1970 *Field Guide to Australian Birds,* 1. Non-Passerines) of the light phase Buzzard but was nowhere near as dark as the dark phase. As it glided westward it held its wings in a flat position but as it turned and flew north-east, into the wind, the wings were held in a shallow "V" shape.

One of the observers (J.H.Y.) has had extensive experience with the species in Queensland and both observers are very familiar with all the other large kite and eagles. At the time of the observation much of New South Wales was in the grip of a severe drought which may have accounted for the presence of this Kite well east of its usual range.

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SPINE–TAILED SWIFT LANDING IN TREE

T. QUESTED

On 16 January 1982 when camped alone at Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve, 34km north-east of Mudgee on the Wollar Road, a small flock of Spine-tailed Swifts *Hirundapus caudacutus* was observed. There were about 20+ birds present at dusk, and as the sky grew darker, the birds flew lower and lower, concentrating on a group of trees around the edge of a roadway and clearing. Gradually the number of birds dwindled until only one could be seen. At last light (20:29 hours), one bird flew low over the ground, passing over me at a height of two metres above my head. The bird swept up vertically and landed one metre from the top of a Rough-barked Apple *Angophora floribunda* sapling.

The Swift landed on the outer leaves with enough force to rock the limb and clung vertically to the leaves as if it was roosting until 20:33 hours when it took off and flew across the clearing to other trees. I did not see the bird land a second time. No more swifts were observed flying after that time although darkness did not set in until 20:50 hours. This is the second occasion that I have observed Spine-tailed Swifts landing on a tree. The first occasion was near Macksville on 5 January 1980, see T. Quested (1980 *Aust. Birds*, 15,52) when one was observed to land in a tree and feed.

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DEW DRINKING BY CRIMSON ROSELLAS

D.C. McFARLAND

During the morning (08:00 hr) 12 July 1980, two Crimson Rosellas *Platycereus elegans* were observed in a patch of dry sclerophyll forest near Waterfall in the Royal National Park Sydney. Both rosellas were removing leaves from a bloodwood *Eucalyptus gummifera* by grasping a leaf with one foot and biting through the leaf stem just above the petiole. Still holding the leaf with the foot, each bird would draw the leaf along between the mandibules licking the moisture from the leaf surfaces. When finished the leaves were dropped to the ground. Each parrot "processed" about four to five leaves per minute for approximately eight and a half minutes before being startled and flying off.

This behaviour has two obvious advantages: 1. It reduces the risk of predation since there is less need to land on the ground to drink from surface water. 2. There is an overall reduction in energy expenditure. Having both food (e.g. gum nuts) and water (dew) available in the same patch means there is no need to search for water sources. The dry winter and the absence of surface water from the ridge area could have been an added incentive for the rosellas to utilise this alternative water supply.

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CHESTNUT–BREASTED MANNIKIN AND FOREST KINGFISHER – FOOD RECORDS

GREG. P. CLANCY

On 4 July 1980 a sub-adult Chestnut-breasted Mannikin *Lonchura castaneothorax* was found freshly killed on the road at Lower Southgate, north of Grafton. It was partly squashed and its crop, which was full of grass seeds, had been exposed. A number of seeds were collected and forwarded to the Department of Agriculture's Seeds laboratory in Sydney via Mr. J. Betts the District Agronomist.

The seeds were identified as 'Caryopses of Gramineae possibly *Panicum* species.'

On 4 January 1981 an immature Forest Kingfisher *Halcyon macleayii* was observed perched on electricity wires at South Grafton. It was seen to drop two small objects from its bill and after it had flown away a search of the ground was made. Two small regurgitated pellets were located which contained insect remains.

The pellets were collected and forwarded to A.B. (Tony) Rose of Ku-Ring-Gai Chase National Park for examination. He found the pellets to contain the following items.

1. the remains of a weevil, probably Curculionidae-Aterpinae; fairly close to the Diamond Beetle *Chrysolopus spp* but not that species;
2. other beetle remains appeared to be Scarabaeidae-Dynastinae *Heteronychus aratora* 'Black Beetle', an introduced pest of corn and grass.
3. a small piece of the leg of a grasshopper (Orthoptera);
4. the head of a small bug (Hemiptera);
5. jaws, bone and scales of a very small skink (Reptilia-Scincidae).

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GULLS FEEDING ON MOTHS

A.J. LEISHMAN

On 4 October 1981 at 18.20 hours (Eastern Standard Time) at Windang, New South Wales, a group of 50 Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* and two Kelp Gulls *L. dominicanus* were observed aerial feeding on moths.

The moths were swarming in thousands from Windang Island (Islet) (30 degrees 33'S, 150 degrees 53'E) towards the mainland, the sandspit of which is uncovered at mid to low tide. At the time of observation the tide was low.

The mixed flock of gulls were feeding on the moths at a height of between two metres to 50 metres in a very active manner and were seen to catch moths on the wing and eat them. A small number of moths was collected for identification, some from the ground on the Islet and others on the wing. The moths were variable in colour but not in form, and were identified by Miss Debbie Kent of the Australian Museum as Bogong Moths *Agrotis infusa*.

Both Silver and Kelp Gulls are recorded in the literature as being omnivorous and take insect items when available. Identification of food items are not commonly given. J.D. Gibson (1979 *Corella* **3**, 103-104) recorded the aerial feeding of Silver Gulls on insects but did not identify the species. A.M. Lea and J.T. Grey (1935 *Emu* **34**, 275-292) recorded Silver Gull, "crammed with numerous maggots, apparently of March flies, water beetles *Nectosoma penicillatum*, many small water bettles *Philhydrus* ....."

These observations demonstrate that both the Silver Gull and the Kelp Gull are opportunistic feeders and records the species of the insect food taken.

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BOOK REVIEWS

BILL ODDIE'S LITTLE BLACK BIRD BOOK by Bill Oddie, 1980, Eyre Methuen Ltd., 11 New Fetter Lane, London. Pp. 148, B & W photographs 9, numerous full and half sketches. 215 x 135 mm. $4.95 sterling, but I paid A$12.55 by direct purchase from publisher.

I have been a fan of Bill Oddie from way back, having watched "The Goodies", at 6pm on ABC Television each week night, with my children for many years, I also happen to be an avid reader of the journal, "British Birds" and have been aware of an observer named W.E. Oddie being mentioned several times in the annual reports on Rare Birds in Great Britain and Ireland and other articles. It subsequently came as a complete surprise to me that my television hero and the noted observer, were one and the same person. I therefore quickly reached for my cheque book on reading in the English bird journals that Bill Oddie had written a book on birdwatching and birdwatchers.

It is noted that the brief summary used to describe this book for library classification states "Bird Watching — Great Britian — Anecdotes, facetiae, satire etc". and the book is all of this! In red across the black cover of the book is the statement, "The Truth about Bird-watching", but whether the book gives one the truth or whether the contents are indeed the satire mentioned in the library summary, is for you to judge.

The entertainment starts with the cover, where there is a picture of Bill Oddie, a tea cosy (well it looks like one anyhow) on his head, covered with the all too familiar badges of the bird watching societies. A strange bird (?) is perched on the top and there is a surprised look on Bill's ruddy, hirsute face, while he fiercely clutches his binoculars and appears to be saying "Look, a b..... Pied-eyed Peaper — first record for Great Britain and Ireland, and a lifer for me!" The cover sets the pace for the rest of the book.

One of the "truths" in the book is all about the characteristics of the real birdwatcher. Not the fat portly old man with big binoculars, nor the little old lady with scarf and wellingtons that are usually portrayed in cartoons and by the media, as birdwatchers, but the mean, calculating, competitive, selfish, dishonest, boorish, pedantic, unsentimental, arrogant and envious "twitchers" (who incidentally prefer to be called a "birder" rather than the derogative but possibly more accurate term "twitcher"). A number of chapters are devoted to discribing "twitchers" and "birders" their equipment, their method of communication, and their "glossary of terms." Those people who live in the Australian Capital cities, will be familiar with the "birders" who locate and report upon unusual and rare birds, and who are the first people out to see a rare bird reported by someone else. Our local "birders" are very aptly described by Bill Oddie, giving us an opportunity to laugh at ourselves.

It is easy to relate to, and be entertained by, Bill Oddies' description of how the news is passed around about a rare bird. How the "birders", having heard the news, plan their weekends to see the maximum number of rare species in the two day break, by the shortest possible route! The author's agonising over whether he can in all honesty claim a dead Sooty Shearwater washed up on a Norfolk beach as a "lifer" and the attempts he went to, to keep a Great Reedwarbler alive (alas it died) so that he could have another "lifer", are no doubt paralleled in our lives (My only Buller's Sheatwater is a dead one on Wanda Beach — a true "birder" cannot tick that species yet!).

The pre-occupation that birders have with lists is dealt with in a very real way-local lists, District lists, State lists, National lists and World lists, all have "lifer" classifications and all are relevant to us as bird watchers. One can judge one's "birder" status by comparing your lists with those discussed in the book. Bill Oddie's eloquent treatise on how to prevaricate when writing up a record of a rare bird (he calls it a "cock-up"), is particularly apt for those readers who have been requested to complete "Unusual Record Report Forms" for the Australian Bird Atlas Prject. Alas the "truth" is out about cover-ups and the Atlas reviewers of URRF's are being much more careful of late.

The photographs and sketches are all by the author. Black and White photographs of "twitchers" (the baddies) and "birders" (the goodies) dominate the photography section. They include one of 300 "twitchers" looking at a Forster's Tern at Falmouth (poor bird!) and a series of three showing Bill Oddie in typical birdwatcher's "juvenile", "immature", and "adult" plumage (the only difference that I could see was an improvement in the quality of the clothing and the fact that the adult (Bill) carried food). The drawings are mainly "notebook illustrations" demonstrating that Bill Oddie is not as "incompetent" in this field as the dust jacket claims. The illustrations add to the entertainment and the satire.

Bill Oddie wrote his own "foreword" for the book because H.R.H. Prince Phillip or Prince Charles or anyone else famous, with a supposed interested in birdwatching, are claimed by the publishers to have refused to have anything to do with it. Touche!

This is the first time that a frivolous, entertaining and highly delightful bird book has been reviewed in the hallowed pages (!) of "Australian Birds", and hopefully it will not be the last. In the words of Bill Oddie, it is a "lifer". I recommend the book to all birdwatchers because the satirical and funny stories, are not only entertaining, but also provide the opportunity to reflect upon the honesty and responsibility of one's own birdwatching activities.

ALAN K. MORRIS.

BOOK REVIEW

FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN by G.M. Storr and R.E. Johnstone, illustrated by Martin Thompson, 1979. Perth: Frank Daniels for the Western Australian Museum. Pp 211, col. p11. 38, b & w p11.2. $19.95.

Ornithologists and bird watchers in Western Australian have long been fortunate in having available one of the standards of Australian ornithology, Serventy and Whittell's "Birds of Western Australia". Now with the publication of their own field guide, it would appear that our colleagues in the west are continuing to show us the way. The new work is attractively presented and the decision to grace the cover with a magnificent photograph of a Lesser Noddy represents a shrewd bit of marketing. It is particularly pleasing to note that like the earlier volume the new guide is an entirely Western Australian production.

The layout is simple. A brief introduction and 40 plates are followed by a descriptive section covering 475 species, a glossary and an index of English names. One could cry yet again – "when will we ever get an Australian field guide with illustrations facing the species descriptions?" – however, in the present offering the species are at least sensibly grouped and easily referenced. An important aspect is the additional coverage of the Kimberly Division, omitted by Serventy and Whittell, and the attention to subspecific variations occurring in that region.

I found the plates pleasing to my rather critical eye and to a high standard of accuracy. I liked the presentation of the birds against a background wash with the colours varying from plate to plate and found the slightly subdued preferable and more lifelike than some of the more garnish offerings of late. It is unfortunate that on many plates up to one third of the available space has been wasted because of excessive top and bottom margins and that a few of the plates are a little washed out, e.g. plate 20 where the greens are all too pale. The book's only real shortcoming lies in the complete lack of flight pictures of waders, birds of prey, albatrosses and petrels. This omission is the harder to comprehend since the ducks are shown in flight from both above and below.

The species descriptions average about six lines with plumage details including female, immature and geographical variations where appropriate and notes on behaviour and song where diagnostic. They also include a useful summary of the range of each species and in many instances an indication of preferred habitat.

Neither the taxonomy nor the common names follow any previous standard although a number of the RAOU recommendations have been followed. For example in the cockatoos the Corellas have been lumped into one species, the Pink Cockatoo reverts to Major Mitchell's Cockatoo and we are offered Baudin's and Carnaby's Cockatoos for the two forms of the White-tailed Black-Cockatoo. One notes with dismay that *Dendrocygna arcuata* has scored yet another name, the Chestnut Whistling Duck though in fairness one must add that such innovations are well covered by cross-referencing in the excellent index of English names.

In summary I believe this volume will serve its purpose as a field guide capably. It is relatively heavy because of the quality of the paper and appears to be sturdily bound. It's durability in the field particularly in view of the soft cover remains to be tested. With its attractive illustrations and accurately presented information it should do much to further interest in ornithology among the general bird watching public; serious field workers will find it invaluable.

ALAN ROGERS.

NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

Contributors are requested to observe the following points when submitting articles and notes for publication.

1. Species, names, and the order in which they occur are to be in accordance with "Handlist of Birds in New South Wales". A.K.Morris, A.R.McGill and G. Holmes 1981 Dubbo: NSWFOC.

2. Articles or notes should be typewritten if possible and submitted in duplicate. Double spacing is required.

3. Margins of not less than 25mm width at the left hand side and top, with similar of slightly smaller at the right hand side of pages.

4. No underlinings and no abbreviations except as shown in the examples.

5. Photographs should be glossy finish and not too small.

6. The *Style Manual,* Commonwealth Government Printing Office, Canberra (1966) and subsequent editions will be the guide for this Journal.

7. Diagrams should be on plain white paper drawn with india ink. Any lettering is to be 'professional style' or lightly pencilled.

8. Dates must be written "1 January 1975" except in tables and figures where they may be abbreviated.

9. The 24–hour clock will be used, times being written 06:30, 18:30 for 6.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. respectively.

10. Mr, Mrs, Dr are not followed by a full stop.

11. In text, numbers one to ten are spelt; numbers of five figures or more should be grouped in threes and spaced by a thin gap. Commas should not be used as thousands markers.

12. References to other articles should be shown in the text–'..B.W. Finch and M.D. Bruce (1974) stated...' and under heading

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CONTENTS

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