

FIELD NOTES ON MEYER'S AND CHESTNUT-SIDED GOSHAWKS

STEPHEN DEBUS

There are few mainland records of Meyer's Goshawk *Accipiter meyerianus*, and the field guide (Beehler *et al.* 1986) implies that it occurs at higher altitudes than the Chestnut-shouldered Goshawk *Accipiter buergersi*. This would seem somewhat incongruous, since Meyer's also occurs on many islands from the Moluccas to the Solomons. Here I wish to record a sighting of what I believe was a black morph Meyer's Goshawk almost at sea level near Port Moresby, and to raise for critical field investigation the possibility that the Chestnut-shouldered Goshawk does not have a black morph as is commonly supposed.

On 8 January 1984 I observed a black *Accipiter* sp. near Keagolo, about 10 km inland from Aroma (c. 100 km south-east of Port Moresby). In mid-afternoon in good light, with the sun behind me, I watched the bird glide swiftly from a patch of disturbed rainforest in a gully, across open ground to disappear into gallery forest fringing a river. It flew about 3 m from the ground at a distance of about 50 m, and was in view for perhaps 10 seconds. Even without binoculars I could see that it was entirely jet-black (not dark grey as in the slate-grey morph of the Grey Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae*), without obvious barring under the wings and tail nor a visibly pale iris. It was also quite large, about the size of a large female southern Australian Brown Goshawk *Accipiter f. fasciatus* c. 50 cm length), and showed a similar silhouette, wing carriage and style of flight (rather straight and level, slightly 'fingered' wings and a long, rounded tail). It was unlike the silhouette of the Australian Grey Goshawk which has very rounded wings with pronounced camber, drooped wings when gliding and shorter, squarer tail; features apparently shared by the New Guinean forms of *A. novaehollandiae*, cf. photographs in Coates (1985). Flight silhouettes may be useful for separating such difficult species, particularly when photographs can be taken and consulted later, since the Chestnut-shouldered Goshawk has a 'six-fingered' wing whereas the other *Accipiter* species have a 'five-fingered' wing (Corben 1982).

Brown & Amadon (1968), first suggested that an alleged black morph in *Accipiter buergersi* might be a case of mistaken identity - a black specimen was perhaps assumed to be *A. buergersi* because *A. meyerianus* was not known to occur in mainland Papua New Guinea at the time. The question has been discussed further (Debus 1985; Czechura 1985), but it has not been satisfactorily resolved. Wattel (1973), had the opportunity to comment on this conundrum, but did not do so.

The field characters and plumages of the Chestnut-shouldered Goshawk warrant further investigation for another reason. While it is apparent that this species is closely related to the Australian Red Goshawk *Erythrotriorchis radianus* (Corben 1982; Czechura 1985), the Red Goshawk seems unlike an *Accipiter* in some respects and there is some debate about its generic position. Is the Chestnut-shouldered Goshawk really an *Accipiter*? It would be good if

PNG ornithologists could resolve these questions before a second edition of the field guide is produced.

- Beehler, B. M., T.K. Pratt & D.A. Zimmerman (1986). *Birds of New Guinea*. Princeton University Press.
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- Corben, . (1982). On Some Field Characters of the Red Goshawk. *Sunbird* 12: 17-18.
- Czechura, (1985). *Australasian Raptor Association News* 6: 70-71.
- Debus, S. (1985). *Australasian Raptor Association News* 6: 31-32.
- Wattel, (1973). Geographical differentiation in the Genus *Accipiter*. *Nuttall Orn. Club*.

NESTING NOTES FROM PACIFIC ADVENTIST COLLEGE

DON HALLIDAY

The campus of Pacific Adventist College, fourteen miles from the centre of Port Moresby on the Sogeri Road, is particularly attractive for the bird life found on its ponds. The following notes result from observations of the nesting habits of some of these campus birds.

BLACK-BACKED BUTCHERBIRD *Cracticus mentalis*

We were fortunate to observe the nest of a Butcherbird located approximately 6 m above the ground in a tree that was close to our lounge room window. The following observations were made in 1983-4:

Early in December 1983, an immature Black-backed Butcherbird was seen in the back yard, following two adults around and squawking for food. As we had been absent for a few weeks before that, we did not see the early stages.

Near Christmas we noticed that two birds were nesting and we presumed they were the same pair.

9 Jan 1984, a chick was seen in the nest.

14 Jan two chicks were seen.

22 Jan the chicks were seen hopping round the nesting tree, and two days later they were in another tree.

1 Feb they were seen flying to the ground beside the parents.

Oct 1984 we noticed that two more young had been raised in the tree behind the house next door, possibly by the same pair.

Discussion:

It seems possible that Butcherbirds can raise two broods in one season. Incubation seems to take almost three weeks. In a short time, about two weeks, the young can leave the nest and a little later they are flying around. For a while after leaving they follow the parents around, squawking to be fed.

Every year the Jacanas on the campus raise a new brood of young, and there have been times when we have been able to observe as many as a dozen chicks in various stages of growth. Especially interesting is the habit of the parent in sheltering the chicks under its wings, so that it can appear to have as many as ten legs - its own and those of four chicks.

The following notes were recorded in early 1984, mostly at weekly intervals.

Date	NEST 1	NEST 2	NEST 3	NEST 4	NEST 5
4 Feb	sitting				
11 Feb	3 chicks	built			
18 Feb	-	4 chicks			
25 Feb	-	4 chicks			
3 Mar	-	4 chicks	built		
10 Mar	3 chicks	4 chicks	sitting	sitting	
17 Mar	3 chicks	4 chicks	sitting	sitting	
24 Mar	-	-	sitting	2 chicks	sitting
31 Mar			1 chick	2 chicks	sitting
7 Apr				2 chicks	sitting
11 Apr					4 chicks
	NEST 6	NEST 7			
14 Apr	sitting				
21 Apr	failed?	sitting			
28 Apr		sitting			
5 May		2 chicks			

Further notes:

- Feb. 11 Three chicks (nest 1) were seen being carried under the parent's wings.
- Feb. 25 A pair were seen mating.
- Mar. 10 It is possible that the bird that was sitting on nest 3 was the same as that from nest 1.
- Apr. 14 A pair was seen mating.
- Apr. 21 The chicks from nest 5 were seen sheltering under the parent.

May 12 The chicks from nest 5 were seen still sheltering under the parent.

May 19 The chicks from nest 5 were feeding around the pond; the chicks from nest 7 were sheltering under the parent.

Discussion:

From my observations it appears that Jacanas may raise more than one brood in a season and the incubation takes place in the wetter season. Incubation may take up to three weeks, and the chicks after hatching are frequently sheltered by the parent, especially in the cooler part of the day, for at least two weeks after hatching. The second brood may start only a couple of weeks after the hatching of the first, and in this case the chicks in the first brood are left fairly much to themselves. Chicks were seen foraging for themselves from the time they are hatched.

MASKED LAPWING

Vanellus miles

The Lapwings were observed to lay their eggs in the open paddocks, and there was no real nest at all. Clutches of eggs were seen in May 1983 and again in December the same year. The following observations were made in April and May 1984:

12 Apr Eggs were seen in a "nest" in the paddock.

14 Apr There were now four eggs. Parents birds were ready to attack on any approach to the nest. One parent was sitting.

26 Apr Two eggs had hatched out; two days later two of the chicks were seen.

9 May Another egg had hatched.

11 May All the eggs had hatched, and there was now no sign of either eggs or chicks. The chicks were seen the next day.

It was noted that no trace of the hatched eggs was left round the nest.

Discussion:

Four eggs were laid by the lapwings. Incubation time seemed to be variable, but was up to three weeks or more. Once the eggs were hatched the site was cleaned up and the chicks were hidden in the grass.

Other Notes

The White-browed Crake *Porzana cinereus* has been seen with chicks in May and April; this was noted in 1983, 1984 and 1985. There are usually four chicks.

- The Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus* relies on other birds to rear its young. In September 1984 a young cuckoo was seen being fed by Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus flavescens*.
- The Australian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* was seen with four chicks in April 1984.
- The Buff-banded Rail *Rallus philippensis* was seen with chicks in January 1984 and in February 1985.
- The Wandering Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna arcuata* was seen with a mate and 13 chicks late in April 1984. They were seen again six weeks later.

BIRD WATCHING OBSERVATIONS

L.P. TOLHURST

UNIDENTIFIED MANNIKIN

On 20 September, 1986, at 17:30 hrs I was watching a flock of Grey-headed Mannikin *Lonchura caniceps* on the campus of Pacific Adventist College, near Port Moresby. Together with this species there were a few Chestnut-breasted Mannikins *Lonchura castaneothorax*. At a range of about 40 feet, I saw a mannikin that resembled neither of these two species. The head, throat and chest were all dark: - black or dark grey. The dark colour on the chest was uniform and extended well down, about half way down the front of the body. The cut off line for the dark colour was quite distinct. The belly was white. There was no chestnut colour on the front of the bird at all. At first I thought that it might be a Black-breasted Mannikin *Lonchura teerinki*. However it seems to be unlikely as this species is listed as being a mountain resident, found from at 1000 feet upwards. The College Campus is at only 150 m. The bird did not look like an immature Grey-headed Mannikin which is often seen on Campus. The only other possibility would be an immature Chestnut-breasted Mannikin.

FEEDING HABITS OF BRAHMINY KITES *HALIAETUR INDUS*

During the winter months of 1986 at the Pacific Adventist College, near Port Moresby, I several times observed Brahminy Kites feeding on the larvae and the pupae of a species of moth or butterfly that feeds on *Delonix regia* leaves. To achieve this the birds would circle over the target tree for some time getting lower and lower, then when about twenty feet above the top of the tree, they would dive down and clutch with their talons at the selected larva or pupa and fly off with what they had succeeded in getting. The trees involved were very close to inhabited houses, some within only 10 m.

OBSERVATION OF A MIGRATING SACRED KINGFISHER *HALCYON SANCTA*.

During the weekend of 27-31 March 1986 I visited the village of Domara, a few miles to the south-east of Cape Rodney, Central Province. On the morning of 30 March I joined a group of village people for a fish drive on the main reef, which was some ten miles offshore. Four large canoes set off with about 80 men. We left a little after sunrise. We travelled south for about two miles, by

which time the weather changed, and a large rain-storm began to lash us, with strong winds. All four canoes took shelter to the leeward of a large sand-bar, where we were protected from the wind and waves. Here we waited out the storm. While riding at anchor, I noticed a Sacred Kingfisher flying around the canoes trying to land. After several attempts the bird crashed into my canoe. One of the men close to me picked it up and gave it to me. It was wet through to the skin, and obviously exhausted. For some time it tried to peck at me, but soon settled down. From the time of year I assume that the bird was on migration from Australia, and had been caught in the bad weather when only a few miles from its destination. During the hour that we waited out the storm the kingfisher lay relaxed in my hand.

When the rain and wind ceased to be a problem, we began to move away from our sheltered waters, and then we turned South to head towards the main reef still some five or six miles distant at that point of the coast. As soon as the canoe turned south, the kingfisher began to struggle in my hand and tried to get away from me.

This kingfisher had been flying in a northerly direction, and at the time no sun was visible, due to the very heavy cloud cover. Since the worst of the squall was now between us and the land, we could not see the land either. My conclusion, as I observed the bird's behaviour was that it struggled to get free at the precise moment we turned south, because it sensed that we were taking it in the direction from which it had just come, and away from the land to which it wished to travel. I kept the bird safely on the canoe all day, and took it back to land in the evening. During the night it got away and made its escape, safely.

KITES AND OTHER BIRDS FEEDING ON CATERPILLAR INFESTATIONS IN POINCIANA TREES *DELONIX REGIA* IN POPONDETTA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

G.E. CLAPP

INTRODUCTION

In the garden of house No. 2, Bambusi Street, Popondetta, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea, stands a poinciana tree *Delonix regia*. This tree, as well as several other tree species in the town, is periodically subject to severe attack by small brown/black, hairless caterpillars, presumably the larvae of a moth. If not themselves subject to predation these caterpillars can strip the leaves until the tree is almost bare. Between 1980 and 1982 I noticed that several species of birds, some of them surprisingly large to be taking such small prey, were taking advantage of these caterpillar plagues and were using them opportunistically as superabundant food sources.