

NOTES ON THE PIED CURRAWONG

During my seven years residence in Mittagong on the southern highlands of N.S.W. I was afforded ample opportunity to observe and study the Pied Currawong (*Strepera graculina*).

I commenced banding operations at Mittagong in 1961, and during the 1962 season I constructed large drop-type traps for trapping Pied Currawongs. Although Mittagong has a small resident population of Pied Currawongs, it also has a great influx of migratory birds, I refrain from saying nomadic because the non-resident birds have a definite arrival and departure period.

The Currawongs start to arrive in very small number in April and they continue to increase until a peak is reached in July. This coincides with the fruiting of the common garden privet, the berries of which are during this period the main source of food supply. The currawongs gorged themselves on the berries and would then fly from the bushes to the feeding trays in my garden and regurgitate large pellets of berry seeds onto the trays.

Although the Pied Currawongs arrived in Mittagong in small numbers and gradually increased to a peak period, the departure procedure was entirely different. The birds departed en-masse during the last week of August and by September only the resident birds remained. I found the Pied Currawong a difficult bird to lure into a drop-type trap; several types of food were used, but I found the best bait to use was fermented bread or over-ripe fruit. I situated my traps at the base of the feeding trays and from this position obtained the best results.

During 1962 I banded 85 Pied Currawongs, and although throughout the banding period I

continually observed birds on the feeding trays with bands on their legs, I only succeeded in retrapping one bird. Once trapped and banded, the Pied Currawong is loathe to re-enter the trap. They will walk around the outside of the trap and attempt to extract food through the wire sides but will not alight on the top near the lid. Birds trapped in 1962 consisted of 78 adults and 9 immatures.

I recently received my first recovery away from the banding point, and this supports the theory that the Pied Currawong moves to cooler localities during the autumn and summer months. I banded an immature bird, 090-55926, on the 20.5.1962; this bird was caught in a rabbit trap and destroyed on the 31.8.1964, two years and three months after banding. It was recovered 11½ miles east of Goulburn and 35 miles S.W. of Mittagong. It is suggested that this bird was following a regular migratory pattern, it possibly left Mittagong in late August, and if a line is drawn on a map from Mittagong, by-passing Goulburn by 11 miles, the line goes through the heart of the Snowy Mountains. It would now appear possible that the Pied Currawongs from the Mittagong area move into the Snowy Mountains, and banders in the A.C.T. could watch for banded Currawongs moving north from April to June and July, and returning south in late August or early September.

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[Jack Walsh was evidently using a top entrance trap. A fellow bander has suggested that he would have done better in the matter of retraps if he had used a trap with a ground-level entrance.—Editor.]

A Note on the White-Backed Swallow

The White-backed Swallow (*Cheramoeca leucosternum*), which is a common species in most of the drier parts of South Australia, often builds its nesting tunnels in close proximity to those of the Rainbow Bird (*Merops ornatus*).

On one occasion, in company with another bander, Mr. Bob Brown, we placed a hand net over an entrance tunnel and were amazed to see the reaction of the species to the light of a powerful torch. Presumably, a number of birds were using the tunnel as a "roosting" place for the night, because, in response to the torchlight, a seemingly endless line of swallows walked out of the tunnel, in "bow-legged" fashion, and into

the hand net. In all, there were 19 individuals, comprising 4 adults and 15 immature birds. Unfortunately several birds escaped before we could band them. Thirteen days later, one of the adults was retrapped three miles away, along with 2 un-banded birds. In all, 51 birds, consisting of 19 adults and 32 immatures, were caught from nests visited within a five mile radius. Of these, 10 were retrapped.

The use of old nesting burrows as a shelter in cold and windy weather is mentioned in "What Bird Is That?" (1958 edition).

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