

Courtship Feeding of Cuckoos

I agree with Klapste (1981) that his observation, and that of Fleming (1979) of Pallid Cuckoos *Cuculus pallidus* feeding one another were instances of courtship feeding in the species. However, as pointed out by Courtney (1967) and again by me (Noske 1978), courtship feeding in Australian parasitic cuckoos is well-known.

Lord (1956) observed similar behaviour by Pallid Cuckoos prior to copulation, though he did not describe the plumage of the participants. My own observations of this species involved males in 'adult' plumage and females in 'second-year' plumage. Courtship feeding has also been recorded in the Fan-tailed Cuckoo *C. pyrrhophanus* (as cited by Klapste), Brush Cuckoo *C. variolosus* (Noske 1978), Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* (F. Smith in Watson 1955; McCulloch 1967; Moffat 1978; Wall 1978), and the Shining Bronze-Cuckoo *C. lucidus* (Serventy 1958). Serventy (1958) observed 20 feedings preceding copulation in the last species.

These records seem too numerous for any to be treated as rare or isolated events, particularly in view of the scarcity of reports of courtship feeding in other Australian birds. Although the function of courtship feeding varies with species, the behaviour probably serves primarily as a stimulus for copulation, or to promote and maintain the pair-bond (Van Tyne & Berger 1971). The first of these suggested functions is undoubtedly important in the case of Australian parasitic cuckoos but our understanding of their social organization seems too poor at present to assess the importance of the second; such information can only be obtained through the marking of individuals.

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