

On this occasion they took no notice of near-by species, and made no stabs with their bills at them, as happens sometimes. They made no attempt to hide nor did they crouch to hide or rest.

The darker coloured upper breast has been described earlier by F. T. H. Smith, *Australian Bird Watcher*, 3 : 133, as being a "broad greyish band across the breast". But this darker colour covers too large an area to be called a band; a later reference of Smith's omits this point.

Three other sightings at Lake Tutchewop are as follows. January 25, 1969, five or six birds seen by H. Jarman, F. T. H. Smith, T. G. Lowe and V. T. Lowe. February 1, 1969, one bird seen by T. G. Lowe and V. T. Lowe, and on March 1, six birds were studied by the same observers.

V. T. Lowe, *Mystic Park, Victoria, 20/2/1971.*

Magpies Defending Nest after Departure of Young. On October 23, 1968, I found a nest of the Black-backed Magpie, *Gymnorhina tibicen*, at Gol Gol, New South Wales. It was situated 19 feet high in a mallee tree, and contained 3 eggs which hatched over a period of two days, October 26 and 27. Magpies usually lay eggs in this area during late August and the first week of September, and this particular nest must have been a replacement one, a very unusual occurrence in my experience. By November 8 only one young bird remained in the nest, the fate of the other two being unknown, and this survivor was last seen in the nest on November 23.

Observations at other nests indicate that young Magpies leave the nest between 30 and 33 days after hatching, so I was not surprised to find the nest unoccupied on my next visit on November 27. The adult male returned to sit on a branch adjoining the nest and gave his usual loud calls of alarm but I could not find the young bird in the vicinity. It is customary for young Magpies to leave the nest before being capable of full flight and to remain on a low branch not far from the nesting tree.

On November 28 I visited the area again to examine two nests which had been built practically under that of the Magpie, one that of a Willie Wagtail, *Rhipidura leucophrys*, the other of a Yellow-tailed Thornbill, *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*, both common nesting associates of the Magpie. As I walked under the Magpies' nest I was viciously attacked by both adult Magpies and was forced to defend myself with upheld arms. These attacks were pressed home for the whole of the period I was engaged in raising my nest-mirror to re-examine the Magpies' nest. This mirror was attacked and buffeted by the birds as it poised over the nest to reveal an empty interior.

I moved away from the nest-tree and the Magpies quietened and began to search for food. To my surprise they carried this food to their young bird, perched on a fallen limb some 200 yards

away from the nest-tree and on the far side of a cleared, grassy area. With some trepidation I walked towards this young bird expecting a repetition of the attacks but this did not materialise. The adults voiced their alarm but flew to the group of trees in which the nest was located and perched there, not even attacking me as I pursued their offspring in a vain attempt to capture it for banding. It proved too strong a flier for me and I left the area wondering why the adults should so vigorously defend an unoccupied nest yet ignore the cries of the pursued youngster. No doubt both the Yellow-tailed Thornbills and the Willie Wagtails appreciated the continuance of their defence umbrella but I doubt if such appreciation was the cause of the Magpies' paradoxical behaviour.

—*J. N. Hobbs, Katoomba, New South Wales, 9/3/71.*

Courtship Display of the White-breasted Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*. Referring to a recent article on the above (*Australian Bird Watcher* 3 : 280) : Yorke, in fact, describes the immediate pre-copulatory behaviour of this species, not the courtship behaviour which is a spectacular aerial display, as is that of many of the larger Accipitridae.

Courtship display of *leucogaster* was observed during July 1970 along the Bensbach River in the far south-west of Papua. In the 60 miles of river south of Weam which was traversed frequently during a field trip to the area, the Sea-Eagles were noticeably paired and fairly evenly distributed along the river.

Courtship display can be separated into two phases. In "mirror-flight" the pair fly relatively close to one another, usually separated both vertically and horizontally by six to ten feet. They parallel each other in flight moving up and down or swerving together, and intersperse this with periods of normal flight. Frequently one bird dives at the other making it sideslip or tip over. At times flight is strong and direct, at times slow and leisurely. This phase of the display is reminiscent of the commonly seen mirror courtship flights of *Sterna* species.

Mirror flight precedes a spectacular "talon clasp" display. In this during the parallel flight described before height is gained until suddenly the lower bird turns upside-down and attempts to grasp the other by its talons. If contact is made both sets of talons lock together, and the pair plummet to earth, swinging wildly round and round like an Argentinian bolas. Twenty feet or so from the ground they separate and resume normal flight. If contact is not made the lower bird repeats its actions until the full display is accomplished.

In all, this complete display was seen on four different occasions at different locations during the week spent on the Bensbach River. During display the birds were quite vocal, giving the goose-like honking characteristic of the species.

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