

Predator-avoidance Behaviour in the Double-eyed Fig-Parrot *Cyclopsitta diophthalma macleayana*

On 29 June at Lake Eacham National Park in far northern Queensland (17°17'S, 145°37'E) I observed a small party of five Double-eyed Fig-Parrots *Cyclopsitta diophthalma macleayana* feeding in a Small-leaved Fig *Ficus obliqua*. I observed the birds from 1245 h until 1700 h at a distance of approximately 3 m. During this time they fed continuously on the small, green, unripe figs. Unusually, the birds were still feeding in the half-light after sunset.

At one point a Scaly-breasted Lorikeet *Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus* gave an intense and high-pitched alarm call. In response, all of the Fig-Parrots immediately ceased feeding and became still and silent. Two of the birds moved closer to the main trunk of the tree. Of particular interest was the behaviour adopted by one of the males. On hearing the alarm call it immediately swung under the branch on which it was feeding and hung motionless in a head-down position. It retained a partly eaten fig in its bill, and its wings were held slightly open. In this position the rump, uppertail-coverts and yellow flanks were exposed, and the eyes were partly closed. Superficially, this position appeared to be mimicking the shape and colour of the surrounding fig leaves. The bird was, however, much larger than the leaves. After a period of approximately 3 minutes the Scaly-breasted Lorikeet gave a less intense call and all of the Fig-Parrots returned to feeding and moving about the tree.

Predator-avoidance strategies such as this have not been reported previously for Fig-Parrots (Forshaw 1981, Higgins 1999). Officer (1967) reported feeding Marshall's subspecies *C. d. marshalli* moving to nearby cover as an observer approached, only to resume feeding after the observer had moved away. Other reports (Constable in Higgins 1999) describe Fig-Parrots leaving the food tree and circling overhead when disturbed.

The behaviour described in this note suggests that Fig-Parrots can be highly cryptic and difficult to detect, and hence surveys may underestimate their numbers. Careful and systematic searching of fruiting fig trees for silent, motionless birds adopting the 'hanging' posture, coupled with repeated and extended surveys of these fruiting figs, may increase the chances of detecting these birds.

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References

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