

A Laughing Kookaburra assists in raising Blue-winged Kookaburras' offspring

Clifford B. Frith^{1*}, Mary-Anne Addington² and Martin Willis³

¹P.O. Box 581, Malanda QLD 4885, Australia

²32 Aitken Avenue, Queenscliff NSW 2996, Australia

³P.O. Box 614, Malanda QLD 4885, Australia

*Corresponding author. Email: frith4885@outlook.com

Abstract. A Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae*, previously reported to have repeatedly inspected a potential nest hollow and mated with an adult male Blue-winged Kookaburra *D. leachii* on Magnetic Island, north Queensland, in August 2025, was photographed feeding a brood of two juvenile Blue-winged Kookaburras at the same location in late December 2025. This is the first record of a Laughing Kookaburra assisting Blue-winged Kookaburras to raise their offspring, as a cooperative helper.

Laughing Kookaburras *Dacelo novaeguineae* and Blue-winged Kookaburras *D. leachii* geographically overlap extensively in Queensland, from the southern border northward through the centre and east of the state to the tip of Cape York Peninsula. Both species occur on Magnetic Island, off Townsville, where they are said to occupy “slightly different habitats” (Wieneke 2000, p. 19). The breeding biology of the two species is very similar, both typically reproducing as cooperatively breeding groups of presumably predominantly, if not exclusively, genetically related individuals. Offspring resulting from a previous breeding season assist adults in raising nestlings and juveniles of one or more subsequent seasons. Social interactions between the species, other than territorial ones, were unknown and hybridisation between them remains unknown (Higgins 1999; Legge 2004, McCarthy 2006).

It has, however, recently been reported that a Laughing Kookaburra repeatedly mounted an adult male Blue-winged Kookaburra, in attempting to mate with it, and

repeatedly inspected a prospective nesting tree hollow as well as the Blue-winged Kookaburra and conspecifics, on Magnetic Island during the last week of August 2025 (Frith & Addington 2025). Nothing indicative of egg-laying by a female Blue-winged Kookaburra having occurred was noted before the observations had to be ended because M-AA departed from the island. These observations constituted the first record of any such sexual and nesting interactions between the two Australian kookaburra species (Frith & Addington 2025).

MW briefly visited Magnetic Island and the nest hollow tree and its immediate area, previously observed by M-AA, from 0945 to 1030 h on 27 December 2025. He observed and photographed what is presumed to be the same Laughing Kookaburra individual assisting at least one adult male Blue-winged Kookaburra in feeding a brood of two juvenile Blue-winged Kookaburras (Figure 1) that probably hatched in the same nest hollow observed being investigated in late August and detailed by Frith & Addington (2025). A male Blue-winged Kookaburra was seen to feed



Figure 1. A Laughing Kookaburra (left) assists Blue-winged Kookaburras on Magnetic Island by feeding their brood of two juveniles. Photo: Martin Willis

the juveniles once, but the Laughing Kookaburra was much more attentive and fed them at least four times.

It seems that the Laughing Kookaburra observed had become socially involved with, perhaps somehow imprinted upon, the Blue-winged Kookaburra group. Its observed reproductive interest involved the repeated mounting of an adult male Blue-winged Kookaburra and the inspecting of a prospective nesting tree hollow (Frith & Addington 2025) together with him and other Blue-winged Kookaburras of both sexes. In the event of the Laughing Kookaburra mating with a female Blue-winged Kookaburra the potential for the first known hybridisation between the species is clear.

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to Jen and Rich Parry for kindly assisting MW on Magnetic Island and James Fitzsimons for reviewing a draft of this manuscript.

References

- Frith, C.B. & Addington, M.-A. (2025). A Laughing Kookaburra and a Blue-winged Kookaburra repeatedly inspecting a nest hollow and mating. *Australian Field Ornithology* **42**, 225–228.
- Higgins, P.J. (Ed.) (1999). *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds, Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbird*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Legge, S. (2004). *Kookaburra: King of the Bush*. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne.
- McCarthy, E.M. (2006). *Handbook of Avian Hybrids of the World*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Wieneke, J. (2000). *Where to Find Birds in North-east Queensland*. Author, Townsville, Qld.

Received 28 December 2025, accepted 30 December 2025,
published online 10 February 2026

