

Use of Mud During Preening by Currawongs *Strepera* Spp.

At Kinglake, Victoria, on 8 September 1990, a warm sunny day, two adult Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* were bathing in a secluded pond. After splashing and shaking themselves they proceeded to dig small amounts of dry, friable yellow earth, then drew their feathers through their beaks. This digging and preening went on for about ten minutes, after which they bathed again. This procedure went on for about an hour, alternatively bathing and preening with earth. Meanwhile a third adult Pied Currawong joined in. At no time did the birds thoroughly wet themselves. It appeared that they were using the earth almost as humans would use soap. One bird, after a final splash, alighted in a tree and spent some time preening in the usual manner. The other birds had flown away.

Similar behaviour has been described previously for the Pied Currawong (Pringle 1988, Purchase 1990, Eastman 1990), Black Currawong *S. fuliginosa* (Green & Swift 1966) and Grey Currawong *S. versicolor* (Hastwell 1985). Thus, all three members of the genus do this, either bathing then applying earth, or applying wet clay directly. In most recorded instances the birds did not wash out the mud, but departed with mud in their plumage.

References

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