

## A Wing-flicking Display Preceding Copulation of the Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata*

Although Australian robins are particularly conspicuous birds, little has been recorded of their courtship or mating behaviour. There are several references to female Australian robins soliciting the male as he feeds her during the breeding season. Allofeeding generally is characterised by a begging display performed by the female as the male approaches with food. Wing-drooping and fluttering or quivering of the wings by the female have been recorded for the Scarlet Robin *Petroica multicolor* (Serventy & Whittell 1967, Boles 1988, Coventry 1989), the Eastern Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria australis* (Marchant 1987) and the White-breasted Robin *E. georgiana* (Schodde & Tiedemann 1988). A male Scarlet Robin may court a female by feeding her, and alternately extending each wing downwards displaying his white wing patch (Schodde & Tiedemann 1988). Robinson (1990) observed a Flame Robin *Petroica phoenicea* male display in front of a female by running back and forth with wings drooped, head tilted downwards and in a crouched position. This display ended in a sexual chase. Although these behaviours are apparently important for pair-bonding and may persist after nesting has begun, they have not been reported as occurring immediately before or after copulation. Marchant (1987) observed copulation in the Eastern Yellow Robin on three separate occasions but did not view any preceding calls or display.

On 26 September 1995, at a study site on Peron Peninsula, Western Australia (25°41'S, 113°43'E), we observed a wing-flicking display by a male Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata*, followed by copulation. The site consists of an acacia-dominated red sandplain where Hooded Robins are uncommon (pers. obs.). Initially, the female Hooded Robin flew to a perch of dead wood 50 m from the observers. Thereafter, the male flew to a Curara *Acacia tetragonophylla* shrub about 10 m from the female, and closer to the observers. He foraged briefly on the ground below the

acacia before perching on an isolated, dead limb 45 cm above the ground. The male then flicked his wings simultaneously, in bursts of two to three wing flicks, each burst lasting up to 2 seconds (Figure 1). A wing flick consisted of a lateral extension of the folded wings followed by a return to their normal position. This was repeated three times before the female landed on the same branch, within 30 cm of the male. The male and female remained side by side facing the same direction. The male flicked his wings once or twice more but the female did not respond in any obvious way. The male then mounted the female, copulation lasting no more than 2-3 seconds. Immediately after dismounting, the male flew away, followed shortly thereafter by the female. No calling was heard at any time during the observation.

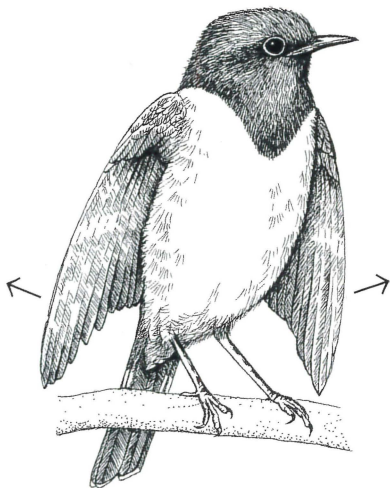


Figure 1. Wing-flicking display by a male Hooded Robin.

Drawing: B. Brooker

Wing-flicking displays have been described for the Pied Tit *Petroica macrocephala* on Little Barrier Island, New

Zealand, and the Garnet Robin *Eugerygone rubra* in Papua New Guinea (Orenstein 1979). The Pied Tit performed wing-flicking in a manner very similar to the Hooded Robin, flicking both wings simultaneously. However, both male and female Pied Tits performed the display facing one another and no copulation was observed. The Garnet Robin was described as flicking the wings open alternately, with the male and female perched side by side and facing the same direction. They 'alternately extended the wing on the side facing the other bird outward and downward, exposing the wing bar' (Orenstein 1979). As in the case of the Pied Tit, copulation did not follow. This appears, therefore, to be the first record of wing-flicking by an Australian robin, leading to copulation.

## References

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