

Long Use of Nest by Lyrebird

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Diverse opinions have been expressed regarding the attitude of Lyrebirds (*Menura novæ-hollandiæ*) towards old or previously-used nests. For instance, A. J. Campbell remarks (1901)—“I can find no evidence of Lyre Birds re-constructing their old nests, as mentioned by one writer, although the birds may build near, or even upon, an old home, but, in rare instances, when the egg has been robbed, another egg has been found in the same nest.” Almost the opposite view is taken by S. W. Jackson who states (1907)—“I have frequently noticed that these birds rebuild their old nests year after year, if they have not been tampered with, or previously robbed.”

The matter was discussed some fifteen years ago (1941) and instances were given of nests having been used twice in successive years, or used again after an interval of one year. Subsequently it was found that, in one of the cases mentioned, the same nest was used at least three times in five years—that is in 1938, 1939, and 1942. Unfortunately, observations were not made in 1941, though they were in 1940 in which year the nest was not occupied.

The history of a nest built in a gully not far from a much-used road bordering Roseville Chase, upper Middle Harbour, Sydney, is of considerable interest. It was first discovered as a ‘cradle’ of sticks, placed on a rock-shelf about five feet from the ground. Damp mossy earth had only recently been added to the inside of the circle of sticks as a base or foundation. The date was August 22, 1948, so it was apparent that the nest would not be completed and an egg laid that year, since nestlings are usually present in July, or August at the latest. A later visit showed that nothing had been added to the structure.

The nest was completed during May 1949 and an egg laid between the 22nd and the 28th of that month, with the young bird leaving towards the end of August. The bird did not return in 1950, although the nest remained in reasonable condition except for the hood, which became dilapidated. Early in May the following year (1951) the nest was rebuilt, or rather the nest proper was built-up on the old one, and its base of sticks, and an egg was laid between June 1 and June 9, followed by a successful hatching.

Judging from the appearance of the structure early in May 1952, the bird had recently given some attention to it, but she did not use it again until 1953, when it was built up again and an egg laid between June 11 and June 20. Again in the following year (1954) the nest was not used, though the earth in the gully was well raked over and display mounds were present, as, in fact, had been the case in all

the nesting seasons since 1948. In 1955, however, no scratchings could be found, a fact indicating that the birds had either met with disaster or had left the area.

Despite a close search of the locality in those years when the nest was not in use—1950, 1952, and 1954—no other nest could be found in the gully. That circumstance, considered in conjunction with the fact that the nest in question was used in alternate years—1949, 1951, and 1953—would appear to suggest that Lyrebirds, or a particular Lyrebird, only nests every second year. Probably such is the case in some instances, but certainly not always, for, as noted earlier, there is evidence of nests having been used in successive years, presumably by the same female. Obviously, solution of the problem depends upon identification of particular birds. Only when individuals are marked and then studied over a period of years will it be possible to reach satisfactory conclusions on questions associated with the use of old nests.

The hen bird at the Roseville nest became quite used to human visitors, including photographers. Sometimes through excitement or alarm when her nestling was being handled, she indulged in mimicry. Once, to the amazement of my wife and children, who were near the nest, she gave a faithful rendering of the panting and yelping of a hunting dog, much like a fox-hound. I also heard the bird, on several occasions, reproduce the sharp notes and the chattering alarm call of the introduced Indian Bulbul (*Otocompsa jocosus*), which frequents the locality. Other calls mimicked were those of the White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Noisy Friar-bird, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Grey Thrush, Grey Butcher-bird, Kookaburra, Yellow Robin, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-cheeked Honeyeater, and the Currawong or Pied Bell-Magpie.

The Lyrebirds of Middle Harbour are less than ten miles from the centre of Sydney, a city of more than a million and a half people. Doubtless they will continue to haunt, for many years, the secluded gullies and forest-clad hillsides of that area of tumbled sandstone, a considerable portion of which lies within the reserves known as Roseville Chase and Davidson Park.

REFERENCES

- 1901 Campbell, A. J. *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*, p. 518.
 1907 Jackson, S. W. *Catalogue and Data of the Jacksonian Oological Collection*, p. 133.
 1941 Hindwood, K. A. 'Nesting Habits of the Superb Lyrebird', *The Victorian Naturalist*, February 1941, pp. 183-188, March 1941, pp. 199-202.

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