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## COMMUNAL DISPLAY OF HOUSE SPARROW

The House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* has a communal display in which several cocks chase a hen. I recorded this behaviour with Alma Secker from 1957 to 1974 round a house in upper Hutt Valley in the south of North Island, New Zealand. Observations were made from July 1957 to September 1958 at weekends and daily from October 1958 to December 1974; records from March 1960 to February 1961 were lost. The chief aim was to find when displays were most numerous but I have used records to February 1972 only for this purpose.

Summers-Smith (1963) says that in Europe communal display stimulates breeding but this statement may be only partly true in New Zealand. I observed that about five per cent of displays began after Sparrows scolded domestic cats but not after they scolded other potential predators such as White-

backed Magpies *Gymnorhina hypoleuca*, Dominican Gulls *Larus dominicanus* (perching beside nesting boxes occupied by sparrows), Spotted Owl *Ninox novaeseelandiae* and Stoat *Mustela erminea*. Also, Sparrows displayed communally to Blackbirds *Turdus merula* posturing in a tree, to Eastern Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis* fighting at a feeder, twice to a helicopter overhead and to a Sparrow caught in a trap, approached by a man.

In Western Europe displays are most numerous in spring about two weeks after the equinox (Summers-Smith 1963), but they tend to peak earlier in New Zealand. As shown in Table I, displays started in March but most occurred in September, after which they decreased and they were noted rarely after the end of January.

TABLE I  
Totals of communal displays 1957-72

	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.
1957-62	8	51	38	53	119	221	309	187	73	49	19	4
1962-67	5	56	85	87	193	404	568	297	158	37	50	0
1967-72	27	143	157	115	208	521	672	424	169	138	68	0
Totals	40	250	280	255	520	1,146	1,549	908	400	224	137	4

TABLE II  
Total communal displays in intervals of seven days from August to October 1962-71

	August				September			October			
	4-10	11-17	18-24	25-31	1-7	8-14	15-21	22-28	29-5	6-12	13-19
<b>1962-66</b>											
Total	76	80	115	95	112	144	135	133	107	107	45
Average	15	16	23	19	22	29	27	27	21	21	9
<b>1967-71</b>											
Total	105	111	91	168	139	134	170	176	146	116	100
Average	21	22	18	34	28	27	34	35	29	23	20
Total	181	191	206	263	251	278	305	309	253	223	145
Average	18	19	21	26	25	28	30	31	25	22	14

By separating the displays observed between August and December in the decade 1962–71 into periods of seven days I found the following intervals had most displays in different years:

August		September			October			
18-24	25-31	1-7	8-14	15-21	22-28	29-5	6-12	13-19
1	2	1	1	1	3	0	1	0

Observations were made on a similar basis each year. However, this arrangement does not show the true times of peaking because in most years there were not big differences in the numbers of displays in each interval. For example, highs that occurred in two years between 25–31 August were almost repeated in September. However, Table II analyses the totals of displays in these intervals. It shows that displays were generally most numerous from 22–28 September but there were almost as many from

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### STRICKLAND ON GOULD

Some years ago I was intrigued by a request for information on Gould made by Drummond's Branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland in London. The bank was celebrating its two hundred and fiftieth anniversary and in searching old ledgers for eminent depositors had come across the name of John Gould of Golden Square. In London the name Gould was associated particularly with the magnificent display of his mounted hummingbirds arranged in numerous small cases at the Natural History Museum, exhibits whose shattered remains I had the sad duty of entering after the war.

The incident was remembered because about the same time a letter to Gould was brought to my attention, which proved to be of special interest. I had been making enquiries for a bird diary believed to have been kept by J. R. Elsey, surgeon and naturalist on A. C. Gregory's overland expedition in northern Australia in 1856. Because Elsey had been a correspondent of Gould, I wrote to the Edelsten family, connected with Gould on his wife's side, which had already provided many historical documents now filed in Australia's Gouldiana. I got no further in the search for the Elsey diary but a letter was brought to me that had been written to Gould by H. E. Strickland, an eminent systematic zoologist. The letter was not recorded in Sir William Jardine's memoirs of Strickland nor in any other connexion, so it seemed that a new item had come to light. I had permission to use the contents of the letter how I wished, made a photostat copy (now deposited in the Mitchell Library) and returned the original. The copy was filed away and forgotten.

Strickland's letter is of particular interest because

15–21 September. From 1962 to 1966 the displays peaked between 8–14 September and from 1967 to 1972 between 22 and 28 September. These findings modify my two earlier accounts (Secker 1958, 1966).

When in Australia in 1974, I noted that displays were taking place commonly in Melbourne and in towns in the south-east of New South Wales near the Murrumbidgee River from 4 to 11 August; this suggests that in Australia too the displays may peak earlier than the equinox.

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it gives a contemporary private opinion of Gould's *Birds of Australia*. It shows how a 'man of science', as no doubt Strickland was regarded, viewed the work of a 'birdman', as Gould was widely known. Part 13 of the folio edition had just been published, on 1 December 1843, to which Strickland was a contributor. On 6 December Gould wrote to Strickland to ask his opinion of the work and Strickland replied: 'I shall have much pleasure in giving it, provided you do not accuse me of being too critical.' The letter was dated 23 December and was written from his home, Cracombe House, Evesham. Gould must have been confident of his product; for, he would have known that Strickland, who was forthright but fair in his remarks, had recently (1840) published a very critical appraisal of G. R. Gray's *List of the Genera of Birds*. At that time Strickland was engaged on behalf of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in assessing factors relating to zoological classification and the formulation of suitable rules, which in due course evolved into the present International Code.

Consequently, as might be expected, much of Strickland's comments centred round the complaint that Gould was 'too much given to making new genera.' He elaborated: 'As long as 2 out of 3 species possess a character which the other wants, it will always be in the power of any person to divide those three species into 2 genera, however closely they may be allied.' The consequence of this action: 'You see plainly that this process would end in making as many genera as there are species . . . the absurdity of which is manifest.' And then advice: 'Genera should not be subdivided further than is