

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

CONSISTENT INDIVIDUALITY IN THE CALLS OF SPINIFEXBIRDS *EREMIORNIS CARTERI* ON BARROW ISLAND, WA

The Spinifexbird *Eremiornis carteri*, as its name suggests, is found mainly in areas of spinifex *Triodia* spp, in north-western Australia with records from central Northern Territory and central Queensland. On the mainland it is a shy secretive bird and thus rarely recorded by casual observers. It is the most common bird on Barrow Island, Western Australia (Sedgwick, 1978, West. Aust. Nat. 14: 85-108), where we tape-recorded its calls in July 1979. The recordings were made at four different places on the island in connexion with work for

the 1979 Barrow Island Research Grant.

As Sedgwick (1978) noted, the birds spent most of their time in or between clumps of spinifex. Periodically, they come to the top of the vegetation and give a series of brief calls at intervals of four or five seconds. These calls are about 0.3 seconds long and lie between two and five kHz in frequency. Figure 1 shows sonagrams of the calls of fifteen individuals. All twenty-three individuals recorded showed differences in their calls but there was no obvious similarity between the

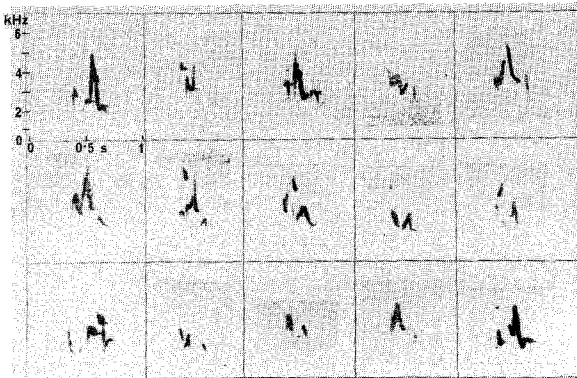


Figure 1. Sonagrams of the calls of fifteen different Spinifexbirds recorded on Barrow Island during July 1979. All sonagrams were made using the narrow (50 Hz) filter.

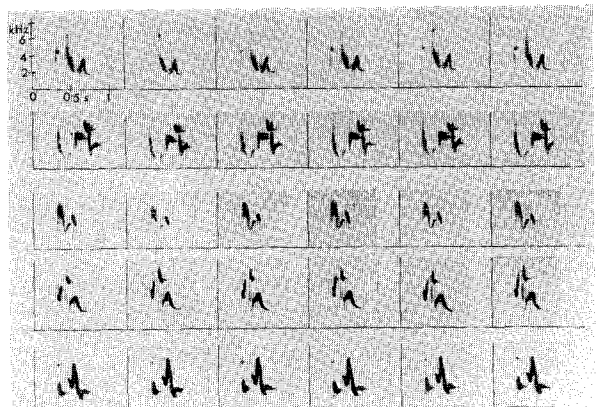


Figure 2. Sonagrams of several calls given by each of five different Spinifexbirds, demonstrating the consistent individuality of their calls. Each of the five horizontal lines illustrates six calls given by the same individual.

calls of birds from any one part of the island. Six calls given by each of five different birds are shown in each row of Figure 2. All birds recorded showed highly consistent individuality in their calls.

Spinifexbirds were normally seen in groups of two, presumably pairs, each pair confining its activities to a small area of spinifex. Visual contact between neighbouring pairs would be difficult in spinifex clumps and regular song bouts probably act as declarations of territorial ownership. In these circumstances consistent

individuality of calls would allow birds to distinguish between neighbours and intruders and might also assist in locating mates.

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