

Reply to Debus

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Debus' comments offer a plausible explanation for my observations, and for the taxonomy employed by natives of Santa Isabel for the very similar species of *Accipiter* that are known from that island.

During a subsequent trip to Santa Isabel in 1992, I observed a nesting pair of the Pied Goshawk *Accipiter albogularis* composed of a melanistic and pied morph. Division of brooding time and its large size indicated that the melanistic bird was probably female (e.g. Brown & Amadon 1968). This tends to support Debus' contention that melanistic birds are likely to be female. Cries near the nest were of the *chatter* variety. I have never observed the pied morph of *albogularis* making the *reo* or *scream* cry. During this same trip, I observed at close range an Imitator or Little Pied Sparrowhawk *Accipiter imitator* on one occasion taking and dismembering prey, and on another occasion as it was mobbed by a mixed flock of insectivorous birds. Both of these observations were probably of the same pied individual, as they were made three days apart in the same locality. Details of these observations are presented in a paper that I will shortly submit for publication.

It is not surprising that neither Diamond nor Blaber observed *imitator*. Blaber reported on New Georgia where *imitator* is not known to occur, and Diamond did not visit Santa Isabel, spent one day on Choiseul and one week on Bougainville (J. Diamond *in litt.*).

Although Debus provides an alternate interpretation of my observations, the knowledge of the calls of both birds is incomplete, and the few specimens that we have of *imitator*, which is wholly lacking males, hardly constitute a representative series. I agree with Debus that there is an urgent need to investigate every aspect of the biology of these and all Solomon Islands endemics. Such investigations will put to rest any doubts that may remain concerning the identity of the melanistic *Accipiter* that I observed on Santa Isabel.

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