

## Adult Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cuculus pyrrhophanus* Feeds Fledgling

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On 16 September 1982, at the Eyre Bird Observatory, I discovered White-browed Scrubwrens *Sericornis frontalis* that had been parasitised by a Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cuculus pyrrhophanus*. The single cuckoo nestling was estimated to be seven or eight days old. I observed the nest from a distance of 10 m with the aid of 8 × 30 mm field glasses for 3 h. Only the two foster parents were seen feeding the nestling. When the nest was observed for a further 3 h on 24 September there were four scrubwrens regularly feeding the cuckoo. The two scrubwrens that were assisting the foster parents to raise the cuckoo were caught and colour-banded close to this nest site six months earlier and had been seen in the area regularly since then so, presumably, the four birds were members of one breeding group. Also in close proximity to the scrubwren nest was an adult female Fan-tailed Cuckoo that probably parasitised the nest. It was first caught and banded in September 1981, it disappeared from Eyre in November 1981 and it was recaptured in the same area in August 1982 (Congreve pers. comm.). No other adult cuckoos were sighted within several hundred metres of the nest site. Although this adult cuckoo was not observed to feed the nestling cuckoo, it did, nevertheless, feed the juvenile once it had fledged. The young cuckoo fledged on 29 September after which it was observed to frequently beg for food from the adult cuckoo and from the scrubwrens that had reared it in the nest, e.g. in a 2 h period on 30 September the fledgling approached the adult cuckoo for food 12 times and the scrubwrens 26 times and the cuckoo fed the fledgling five times whereas the scrubwrens offered it food on 14 occasions. The adult cuckoo fed the fledgling for up to five days before disappearing from the area, whereas the scrubwrens continued to feed it for two weeks after it had left the nest. The juvenile cuckoo was last seen in the area on 14 October 1982.

Smithers (1977) and Marchant & Hohn (1980) record Fan-tailed Cuckoos feeding others of their own species before or during courtship displays, and Courtney (1967) and Noske (1978) cite references to similar behaviour for other species of Australian parasitic cuckoos. This led Klapste (1981) and Noske (1981) to conclude that this feeding behaviour stimulates copulation or promotes and maintains the pair bond. Whilst not disputing these conclusions, my observations, along with those made by Kikkawa & Dwyer (1962) and Woodell *et al.* (1985) suggest that the continued begging behaviour of the recently-fledged cuckoo may stimulate birds close by to feed it. The feeding behaviour observed at Eyre clearly has nothing to do with courtship feeding and it is the first clear evidence that adult cuckoos do feed fledglings, perhaps their own offspring.

### References

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