

Nesting Notes on the Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike

By J. A. TUBB, Hobart, Tasmania.

At about 9 a.m. on August 23, a Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike was seen to alight on an almost-completed nest in a eucalypt near Gunnamatta Bay, N.S.W. The nest was about thirty feet from the ground, on the fork of an almost horizontal limb about three inches in diameter. The following notes were later recorded:

August 23

1.05 p.m.—Both birds visited the nest with cobwebs, which were applied by wiping motions of the beak. The bird sat on the nest and smeared the cobwebs alternately left and right.

1.10 p.m.—Both birds visited the nest with cobwebs.

1.11 p.m.—Female at nest with fine twigs. The twigs were forced into the matrix of the nest and cobwebs smeared over them.

1.12 p.m.—Male visited the nest with twigs.

1.30 p.m.—Male visited the nest with cobwebs.

1.35 p.m.—Both birds at nest, male with twigs and cobwebs, female with cobwebs.

1.53 p.m.—Female visited nest. Brought no nesting material, but arranged loose material on nest.

1.55 p.m.—Both birds at nest, male with twigs and cobwebs, female without nesting material.

1.56 p.m.—Female at nest with cobwebs.

2.00 p.m.—Observation period ended.

August 24

9.15 a.m.—Both birds at nest with twigs and cobwebs.

9.23 a.m.—Female, on returning to nest, alighted on end of dead spur which formed part of nest base. Spur broke at edge of nest but remained suspended by part of nest.

9.24 a.m.—Male at nest with twigs and cobwebs.

9.47 a.m.—Both birds at nest, with cobwebs.

10.01 a.m.—Female at nest with twigs.

10.11 a.m.—Male returned, closely followed by female—both with twigs and cobwebs.

10.16 a.m.—Female at nest with twig.

10.24 a.m.—Male at nest with twig.

10.25—Female at nest with twig. Stayed nine minutes, reforming edge of nest and clearing away broken part.

11.12 a.m.—Both birds at nest with twigs.

11.15 a.m.—Female still at nest. Male returned with twig.

11.25 a.m.—Observation period ended.

August 26

9.00 a.m.—The broken spur had fallen, probably during the previous night, when a strong wind sprang up. The spur was found close to the nest tree.

The nest was under observation several times during the day, and although it appeared to have been completed, the birds were not seen.

August 27

The nest was closely watched all day, but the birds failed to reappear.

GENERAL NOTES

In referring to "male" and "female" in the above notes, the differentiation was based on both the behaviour of the birds and a slight though readily-observable colour difference. The female was always the first to alight upon the nest on those occasions when both birds returned together, and usually spent longer periods at the nest. The black coloration of the face and throat of the female was sharply defined, whereas in the male the black feathering tended to merge into the grey of the upper breast and extended further down on the sides and front of the throat.

The birds rarely remained at the nest for more than about half a minute and always approached the nest directly, never alighting in adjacent trees. When first observed, the nest was well advanced, and on each occasion on which the birds added to the structure the builder sat upon the nest, working the twigs and cobwebs into the outer edge.

The liquid "churring" call of the Cuckoo-Shrike was seldom heard during the constructing of the nest, although the male uttered the characteristic cry on three occasions when he visited the nest with material.

This pair of birds entirely omitted the typical folding and refolding of the wings during their nest-building activities. The birds would alight at or near the nest, immediately adding the new material to the structure. Even if one bird had to wait until its mate left the nest, the wings were held still. After leaving the nest, and particularly after short flights in pursuit of flying insects, the characteristic actions were performed when the birds alighted.

As it seemed, by the disappearance of the birds from the nesting site, that the nest had been abandoned, possibly on account of the damage caused to the nest when the broken limb was torn off by the wind, attempts were made to locate the new nest site. On August 29 the male bird was seen in a gully about half a mile from the original site.

Another Cuckoo-Shrike flew into a nearby tree, apparently having come across Gunnamatta Bay. The male immediately attacked the newcomer and chased it for about a mile along the eastern shore of the Bay. On his return to the gully, he flew for several minutes in long sweeping flights high over the area, finally settling in a tall tree and uttering the typical call. The female was not seen nor was the new nest, if any, located.

On August 31 the pair was seen working over the old territory and remained in view for about fifteen minutes. Towards the end of that period, the female was observed to return to the original nest site, on which there was no sign, viewed from the ground, of the old nest. The female perched on the fork and gathered the few remaining cobwebs, which were clearly seen in her beak. She then flew rapidly northward, towards the gully in which the male had been seen two days previously.

The ground under the old nesting site was closely examined but no trace of nesting material was found. From the last observed actions of the female, it appears probable that the original nest was removed, piecemeal, to the new nest site.

Stray Feathers

Aethya 1816 versus *Aythya* 1822

Aethya Dumont, *Dict. Sci. Nat. Levr.*, vol. 1, suppl. p. 71, Oct. 12, 1816.

Aythya Boie, *Tageb. Reise Norwegen*, p. 351, before May, 1822.

Aithya Boie, *Isis*, April, 1828, col. 359.

The derivation of the above names is from the Greek *Aithyia*, a gull, and this is the corrected name as used by Gloger in 1827. Gloger also used *Aethyia*, as did Agassiz in 1846. Ai is the Greek form and Ae the Latin form of the same word. As Boie changed his Ay to Ai we have *Aithya* Boie. How does this differ from *Aethya*? Other spellings are *Aythia* Salvadori; *Aythya* Bonaparte.—GREGORY MATHEWS, Canberra, 22/8/41.

Choosing the Nest Site.—Which bird chooses the nest site—the male, female, or both? Practically nothing is known of this interesting and important phase of behaviour, which must be repeated every year by nearly all birds, including the commonest species. That so little has been recorded is due, perhaps, to the fact that such knowledge is gained nearly always by chance. Once the nest site is selected it becomes the focal point of all the bird's activities,