

NESTING OF BROWN SONG-LARK

Two nests of the Brown Song-Lark (*Cinchorhamphus cruralis*) were found in a grassy paddock at Pitt Town on January 10, 1955. One contained two eggs, the other three eggs, and both were well hidden in matted couch grass and were only found by seeing the birds flush from their nests. I have an idea that the males are polygamous as quite a few females were seen in the area but only two males. One in particular flew from one spot to another uttering its peculiar creaking and cackling notes, gliding to a post and elevating its tail, occasionally giving a few notes when perched. The other male had very little to say and glided without calling.

The Song Thrush: Additional Notes

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The following observations are presented as supplementary notes to an earlier paper (*Emu*, 55, p. 135) on the Song Thrush in Melbourne.

Song

The *Handbook of British Birds*, vol. 2, 1948, provides a chart (here reconstructed in part) of the yearly song periods for this species in the south of England. Observations by the writer on the species in Melbourne during the years 1950-55 suggest that a general picture of the Melbourne song periods can be represented as in B. The song data

Song Periods

A. England B. Melbourne

-inter Spring Summer Autumn W-
Jan Feb Mar Apr May June July Aug. Sep. Oct. Nov. Dec.

A.							---				---		
	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	
B.			---	---	---	---					---	---	

kept during this period have been averaged out to produce this chart. The data are not comprehensive enough to make it more than tentative. It is to be noted also that the months are here arranged to correspond with the English seasons. Whilst this is an over-simplification, since the climatic conditions for each season are not the same in the two countries, it does permit the seasonal changes and seasonal song development to be presented in the same sequence.

The *Handbook* is not clear as to whether the unbroken line for regular song refers to song from a majority of males or can simply mean that song is heard throughout this period even if only a few males at any particular time are producing it. In the case of the Melbourne notes the unbroken line refers to widespread and sustained regular song from many birds, the dashes to either widespread but brief or slackening song, or to sustained song from only one or two individual males in an area.

It will be seen that the suggested pattern in Melbourne is generally similar to that found in England with the exception of a slightly longer silent period at the end of the summer. If this difference is an established one it might be thought that the Australian summer places a physical strain on the bird which demands a longer recuperation period. A comparison of the average summer temperature and relative humidity (admittedly only two climatic factors) for the two localities however does not show differences which would readily account for it.

C. *Average Temperature*

	<i>Dec Jan Feb</i>				<i>June July Aug.</i>		
<i>Melb.</i>	65.3	67.3	68.3	<i>Kew. Eng.</i>	59.5	63.0	62.2

D. *Average Rel Humidity*

	<i>Dec Jan Feb</i>				<i>June July Aug.</i>		
<i>Melb.</i>	59	58	62	<i>Kew. Eng.</i>	71.2	70.9	74.8

Mimicry

Fairly close attention has been given to this aspect of song. Whilst it was at first believed that the Song Thrush was a regular and able mimic, it soon became disturbing to hear every singer mimicking two or three native and/or introduced species. It is the writer's present belief that the Song Thrush includes in its normal song a wide range of sounds which can be easily mistaken for borrowed calls.

Nevertheless mimicry in this species does exist overseas (Coward and others) and in addition to the four species previously listed the calls of which the writer has heard borrowed, i.e. Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*), Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), White-plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga penicillata*) and Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), mimicry of the following has been heard—Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novæ-hollandiæ*) and Willie Wagtail

(*Rhipidura leucophrys*).

In the Melbourne University grounds, on two successive evenings in October 1951, at the same time and place, a bird, which was believed to be the same individual, was heard to mimic the first five species. At Hawthorn, in November 1952, a Song Thrush, perched in a dense shrub and not actually seen, was heard engaged in soft song. After a variety of normal soft calls, there was heard what could only be described as an obvious attempt to mimic the 'sweet pretty creature' call of the Willie Wagtail. An interesting feature of this was that in the deeper ringing notes the timbre peculiar to the Wagtail was achieved, whilst the final shriller and half-chattering notes were not so aptly caught. The 'amateurish' quality of the call was, in fact, the most convincing evidence that it was a genuine example of mimicry.

Little seems to have been published about the Song Thrush on such aspects as Victorian distribution and population, and a perusal of the *Handbook* supplies various points on which ecological comparisons with the species in Britain are still to be made.

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Red-tailed Tropic-bird at Port Kembla, N.S.W.—A Red-tailed Tropic-bird (*Phaëthon rubricaudus*) was seen by us while on the Five Islands (Port Kembla, N.S.W.) during the early afternoon of November 13, 1955.

Approaching from the north at about 150 feet, the bird resembled a small Gannet in its very whiteness and style of flight. Overhead, the red tail streamers were immediately obvious. Fortunately, it showed considerable curiosity and circled about us several times at a very convenient altitude for observation, affording excellent views of its immaculate plumage, heavy orange-red bill and red tail plumes which were at least a foot long. The black facial marking and black feet were also conspicuous. After a leisurely inspection of the extensive Silver Gull and Crested Tern colonies on neighbouring No. 2 Island, the bird returned to us and circled once more before departing. Its steady circling flight over the Gull colony was once interrupted by a sudden upward flutter resembling the described aerial antics of courting birds. The weather was warm and sunny with a light south-west wind.

The known history of the species in south-eastern Australia is summarized in two notes by K. A. Hindwood (*Emu*, vol. 47, p. 57, and vol. 55, p. 160).—J. D. GIBSON and A. R. SEFTON, Thirroul, N.S.W., 6/12/55.