

- several years the forester in charge of State Forests in north-west Victoria, including the Kulkyne State Forest).
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  3. H. T. Condon, 'Notes on the Birds of South Australia', *The South Australian Ornithologist*, vol. 20, parts 3, 4, 5 and 6, issued together August 1951.
  4. Charles Thompson, as reported by 'Steele Blayde' (Gifford Hall), 'From Kulnine to Kulkyne—Reminiscences of Charley Thompson of Kulkyne', *Sunraysia Daily*, February 15, 16, 17, 18, 20 and 21, 1933.
  5. Thomas P. Austin, in A. J. North, *Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania*, vol. IV, pt. 1, pp. 64-65, 1913.
  6. F. E. Howe and J. A. Ross, 'On the Occurrence of *Psophodes nigrogularis* in Victoria', *The Emu*, vol. 32, pp. 133-148, Jan. 1933.
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  8. K. A. Hindwood and E. Mayr, 'A Revision of the Striped-crowned Pardalotes', *The Emu*, vol. 46, pp. 49-67, July 1946.
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## Nest Site Selection by the Spotted Pardalote

By P. A. BOURKE, Cowra, N.S.W.

In *The Emu*, vol. 41, p. 162, Mr. N. L. Roberts records his observation of what appeared to be behaviour concerned with the choosing of a nest site by a pair of Spotted Pardalotes (*Pardalotus punctatus*).

Near Wallsend, N.S.W. on the afternoon of August 10, 1946, I was fortunate enough to have a more prolonged view of the same type of behaviour. I was 'nesting' in a belt of open forest when my attention was caught by an unknown call—a loud, single note uttered at intervals of about two seconds, apparently coming from the top of a sapling about twenty feet high and fifty yards away. As I stole nearer I heard another 'new' call, a much softer one sounding almost exactly like 'too-ber-k'll.' This seemed to originate in a patch of scrub about fifteen yards away. I paused to place the direction more accurately and then became aware of a pair of Spotted Pardalotes in a small, almost leafless bush within six feet of me—and it was these birds which were responsible for both unfamiliar calls. They provided a most interesting duet, the female's loud single note being so perfectly synchronized with the male's soft call that it would have been easy to believe that only one bird was calling. I shall return to the subject of this duet later.

The male remained on one perch, twisting his body and turning his head from side to side, with the 'crest' feathers elevated. His body was stretched to its greatest extent

so that he seemed unusually long and slim. His head was slightly down-bent so that his beak pointed towards the yellow throat patch, which, like the white spots on the feathers of the crown, was most conspicuous.

On the other hand, the female moved continuously, hopping from twig to twig, conveying to the anthropomorphic observer an impression of excited restlessness. The calling continued for several minutes, when the female broke off and flew to a nearby tree. Then the male stopped calling, subsided into a normal posture, and, after a second or two, darted to the ground where he sat quite still and commenced to utter a series of notes which resembled the rapid ticking of a watch. This was continuous for at least a minute, then the tempo slowed gradually and the calling ceased. The bird flew to a low bush, sat for a few seconds and then returned to the ground about a yard from the original spot. When it commenced 'ticking' again I timed it. The strange calling lasted for 3 minutes 12 seconds without a break. Returning to its perch the Pardalote sat almost motionless for about a minute, after which it flew to the ground again, at a third spot, this time just out of my field of vision. Now the 'ticking' continued for 4 minutes 40 seconds, again without a break, although on three occasions it slowed and almost halted.

Immediately after the calling ceased, the female joined the male. They remained on the ground in silence, tantalizingly out of sight, for several minutes and then flew away over the tops of the trees. An examination of the first two places revealed nothing at all, but at the third there was what could have been the beginnings of a nesting tunnel. A small hole extended for about two inches into the side of the hill. Unfortunately I was unable to continue my observations because I was transferred from the district a few days later and so do not know whether the female approved of the site.

The brief episode was intensely interesting, even if only because it proved that 'common' and 'commonplace' are not necessarily synonymous. Here was a common bird which I should have said I knew fairly well, yet in the space of a few minutes it had confounded me with three strange calls and had revealed an aspect of its behaviour with which I was quite unfamiliar. Further it had shown that it not only indulged in duets but also that its duet was endowed with a ventriloquial quality. In bird literature there are many references to duets of various types. To quote a relevant example, G. M. Allen, in *Birds and their Attributes*, writes—

I recall one [species of East African bush-shrike] in which the male bird uttered a series of ringing notes like measuring beats of an anvil, while the mate replied with a series of double notes exactly timed to fill the interval between the anvil strokes. This

pretty duet lasting several seconds was done with such precision as to give the impression of a single bird singing.

It is obvious that a paraphrase of Allen's remarks could refer to at least two Australian birds—the Magpie-Lark and the Whipbird. To these, I feel, the Spotted Pardalote could be added.

Edward A. Armstrong, in his *Bird Display and Behaviour*, quotes many instances of various types of duets and even of 'community singing.' I would suggest that the term *complementary duet* be reserved for, and applied to, that type of duet in which a pair of birds, uttering different notes at spaced intervals, call "with such precision as to give the impression of a single bird singing."

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**Banded Plover Increasing.**—Tasmania is singularly favoured by having a large population of Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novæ-hollandiæ*) dispersed through the settled parts of the island, and at one time the bird was considered—as may have been the actual case—to be contributing to the serious decline in the numbers of the smaller and more handsome Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*); but during the past three years it has been obvious that the latter species is not only holding its own but indeed re-establishing its position. Paddocks which held but three or four pairs a few years ago now support small flocks. This year I made some counts, chiefly through the Midlands and near Launceston in the north, and I make it a practice wherever I go now to check their numbers whenever possible. A flock of 15 birds was seen recently at Evandale; another of 12 at Perth; one of seven near Melton Mowbray; one of seven at Bridgewater. Counts of five and six are common, and in fact odd pairs are seen in places where none has been observed for several years. Whilst my records and observations reflect a positive increase in numbers, I am not able to give the reason for it. The Spur-winged Plover is still in direct competition with it as regards food, and both species are fully protected. The explanation may be found in the larger clutches of eggs which the Banded Plover appears to lay, for a clutch of five is not unusual, four being the average, whilst the average clutch of the Spur-winged Plover is three.—MICHAEL SHARLAND, Hobart, Tas., 26/8/52.

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