

FEMALE BLACKBIRD ATTACKING MIRROR REFLECTION

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Territorial threat display is well known in many species of birds and in Blackbirds *Turdus merula* it is particularly common at the start of the breeding season (Gurr, 1954; Snow, 1958). This note describes unusually intense and prolonged territorial behaviour by a female Blackbird towards its own reflection.



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Plate I — Four views of female Blackbirds pecking at reflection in chrome headlight rim. Note the tattered tail and the droppings smeared on bumper and grill.

On 20/8/69 at 0905 hrs., in the Ecology Division carpark in Lower Hutt, I noticed a male Blackbird apparently 'attacking' or displaying to its own reflection in the chrome rim of a car headlight. After about two minutes the male was replaced by the female which behaved similarly, and continued to do so intermittently for 26 days until 15 September. The male took no further interest in any of the cars, although it frequently fed on the lawn close to the displaying female.

The right headlight rim of one car was most frequently attacked, although chrome radiator grills, bumpers and hub-caps of this and other cars were also attacked. Usually the female stood on the bumper and pecked at her reflection in the nearest part of the chrome rim, with head arched, wings fluttering and tail repeatedly fanned and cocked (Plate 1). This behaviour was observed on 18 of the 20 days that observations were made. On 21 August, the female spent at least 5 hours displaying or resting on the bumper compared with 2½ hours on the first day. After several days of this behaviour, which persisted in all weathers with only brief stops to feed or rest, both tail and primaries became very tattered and the car radiator grill and bumper became stained with droppings and scratched. By afternoon she was obviously tired and rested for longer periods between displays. On the next day, however, she began again with renewed vigour. By the second week of September only brief encounters on the cars were noted, the last record being on 15 September. After this both male and female were often seen feeding on the lawn by the carpark taking no notice of the cars.

In New Zealand, Blackbird territories are established from April onwards and nest building begins in late August (Gurr, 1954). Thus these Blackbirds were probably starting to nest when these displays began on 20 August. By 15 September, the female may have been incubating and so less aggressive.

These aggressive displays were more violent and protracted than those described by Snow (1958) and Jackson (1952) in garden habitats in Britain. Although the male Blackbird is usually more aggressive than the female in defence of the territory (Snow, 1958), Jackson (1954) reported that sometimes the female attacks an intruder more directly, without the male's elaborate display. Other reports of display or fighting at reflections in windows or mirrors, include a male Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* in New Zealand (Grant, 1967), Blackbirds in Germany (Niebuhr, 1957) and male Robins *Erithacus rubecula* in Britain (Lack, 1965). Several enquiries have been made in recent years to Ecology Division by members of the public about Blackbirds pecking windows.

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