

## COMMUNAL DISPLAY AND COURTSHIP FEEDING IN THE SHINING CUCKOO

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Between mid-November and early January of 1958 and 1959, I observed communal display in the Shining Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*) at Ngatapa, 15 miles west of Gisborne. In communal display the Shining Cuckoos gathered together, calling and flying from place to place.

These observations were made on 19th December, 1958, 19th, 26th and 30th November, 1959, 3rd, 10th and 11th December, 1959 and 9th January, 1960, covering much the same period of time as those dates given in earlier descriptions in Notornis. Watson and Bull (Notornis: V, 226) record it on 13th December, 1949, and again on 7th January, 1950. Gudopp (Notornis: V, p. 253) records it on 14th December, 1953, and McKenzie (N.Z. Bird Notes: 1, p. 76) observed it "several times in December, 1943, and early January, 1944."

Thus communal display has been observed for a period of just over seven weeks between mid-November and early January.

It has been observed at almost all hours of daylight, my records being limited to three between 10.30 and 11.15 a.m. and seven between 2.30 and 5.55 p.m. However, Watson and Bull (Notornis V, 226) record it at 6.30 a.m. and 1.15 p.m. and Gudopp (Notornis V, 253) at "about noon."

Display lasts for varying lengths of time; on 11th December, 1959, it apparently lasted one hour 50 minutes, when I observed it at 2.30 p.m. and again at 3 o'clock, 3.30, 4.20 and 4.30 p.m. On 19th December, 1958, I observed display for about ten minutes but generally it lasted less than five minutes. Watson and Bull observed it for an hour, from 6.30 to 7.30 a.m., but other records are of short duration. It may be repeated at different times of the day, as on 26th November, 1959, when it was seen at 11 a.m. and again at 5.30 p.m.

The number of birds involved varied, my highest counts being four with one or two more possibly present but in some the numbers were smaller and in one case only two were present. Watson and Bull on 13th December, 1949, counted five, Gudopp records six, and McKenzie "up to ten birds."

The dominant feature of communal display in the Shining Cuckoo is the call, a drawn out downward slur (very similar to, if not the same as the last notes of the common call), which may be quite frequently repeated and at the height of display the calls from all birds may be nearly continuous. On three occasions in December, I also heard them utter another note, a rather musical chatter, less frequently uttered and not as loud as the downward slur.

During display the Shining Cuckoos gathered together in the trees, often high up and difficult to observe, calling and flying from branch to branch. While remaining still they sat very erect but most of the time they appeared very restless or agitated, moving frequently and on several occasions moved from one tree to another, up to 20 or 30 yards apart.

No feeding was noted during it, but one bird was seen preening during display.

Watson and Bull suggest that courtship feeding may occur during communal display, but on no occasion did I see one Shining Cuckoo feed another. The clearest descriptions of courtship feeding in this species are found in the Classified Summ. Notes, of Notornis IV, 52 and VI, 103, and the description of this behaviour differs markedly from that in communal display. The observations occurred earlier than recorded for communal display, occurring on 17th October, 1939, and 2nd November, 1953, respectively and in neither were there more than two birds. There is no mention of the downward slur or chattering note, but in one of the observations on 2nd November, 1953, the male was described as giving the usual call with the female making quiet cheepings. Also the posture appears to be different, in the description of courtship feeding on 17th October, 1939, the male was described as "hunting for food, tail erect and vibrating with excitement."

These observations indicate that courtship feeding and communal display are separate and distinct forms of behaviour but further observation is required before we can determine their significance in the life of the Shining Cuckoo.



## SHORT NOTES

### A ROOSTING COLONY OF MYNAS NEAR ARDMORE COLLEGE

On 10/9/59 an observation was made of the roosting of the Mynas (*A. tristis*) near Ardmore College. With only one observer the count could not be accurate, but the behaviour of the birds after arrival at the roosting area was the main centre of interest.

The evening was almost cloudless, with no wind, but in spite of this the incoming groups flew low, gaining height to fly over the hedge when necessary.

6 p.m. — All quiet with a group of 20 Mynas and 20 Starlings perching in the *elaegnus* hedge. 30 Mynas on the grass between the latter hedge and a stand of *lawsoniana*.

6.5 — 10 birds arrived from Clevedon direction and flew to the *elaegnus*. 20 birds from the Papakura direction perched in a hawthorn hedge on the Ardmore College side of the road. Very little song at this stage.

6.10 — Small parties arriving continually from Clevedon direction, landing in the *elaegnus* hedge. Some of the earlier arrivals flew to the paddock. Many in the paddock flew to the *lawsoniana* hedge and began to sing, as did the birds in the *elaegnus*. Beginning to get dark.

90 birds now on the ground with others flying backwards and forwards to the hedges. 60 birds in the hawthorn hedge, all arrivals from the Papakura direction. Singing in the *elaegnus* hedge died away to the odd twitter.

6.13 — Starlings flew from the *elaegnus* hedge in a southerly direction, 30 Mynas from the paddock taking their place as they flew. Groups of 2 and 3 arriving from Clevedon at intervals of about 30 seconds.

6.15 — 80 birds left the hawthorn hedge at the passing of a car, and flew to the *elaegnus*. 7 birds from Clevedon direction arrived. A considerable fluttering developed in both hedges as the birds moved out to the tips of branches and started singing.