

# Movements Of The Spangled Drongo

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Alex Chisholm (*Emu* 1945, vol. 44, p. 197) in his discussion of birds mentioned in the Gilbert Diary wrote of the Spangled Drongo (*Chibia bracteata*), "There is no accounting for the caprices of this curious bird".

Generally the Drongo appears to keep within the behaviour pattern set in Cayley's "What Bird is That?" (4th edition, 1966, page 16), "chiefly migratory, arriving from the north during October and departing in March. Some birds wander to south-eastern New South Wales in autumn and winter; others remain in the north all the year".

Miss Ella Pratt, who lives east of Murwillumbah, has reported in her various field notes published in "Queensland Bird Notes" that each summer for eight consecutive years from 1958 to 1965 a pair of Drongos has nested in the same spot near her home. They arrive in September, breed, and depart for the winter about the following April. These nestings have resulted in the rearing of over two dozen young Drongos.

During my five years at Wellington Point on Moreton Bay this procedure has been reversed. Here Drongos have been regular winter residents from March or April to September; they are absent during summer. Sometimes in March and April parties of up to five Drongos move through to the north with that suggestion of urgency that seems typical of migration.

In winter 1964 when Drongos became regular visitors at my sugar and water honeyeater feeder it seemed too good a chance to miss, so two were banded. The band from one of these was returned by a farmer to CSIRO. The bird was reported as found dead—no explanation—two months after banding and about four miles south east of the banding site.

A further two Drongos were banded after being weighed and measured in the winter of 1965. Another banded one was sighted but not handled.

In winter 1966 both banded and unbanded Drongos were sighted on the bird bath and so gave hope of some proof. The most regular visitor to the feeder proved to have only one foot so although it was weighed and measured it was not banded. On August 11, 1966, a Drongo wearing a band was caught here. It was weighed and measured and the band number 060-23810 recorded. This bird had been banded here by me twenty-five months earlier on July 23, 1964 (see Recovery

Round-up (p. 18). This retrap suggests that at least some Drongos have regular wintering sites much further south than expected. Both these 1966 birds continued their use of the feeder until they departed in September, the lame bird being in about three times each hour.

A retired farmer, on seeing the lame Drongo at my feeder assured me that to keep any bees at Tewantin he found it necessary to shoot two or three Drongos near his hives each week in spring; on opening one of these he counted 52 bees in its crop. The lame bird here has been seen to catch bees, then perch and manipulate them with its bill and single foot to position them for swallowing. It also caught and killed a juvenile Black-headed Pardalote (*Pardalotus melanocephalus*) which was feeding in a sapling crown. It took this bird on to the ground to eat it. The Drongo was frightened off by my sudden rush so that the Pardalote corpse was collected. It weighed 10 grammes.

On July 25, 1963, Miss Ella Pratt visited the Cape Byron Lighthouse area. In a nearby patch of coastal scrub she saw four Spangled Drongos. Knowing of my wintering Drongos she suggested that these four, too, may have found a satisfactory wintering site.

In *Emu*, 1931, vol. 30, p. 289, L. M. Mayo reported a Drongo as staying over the winter in Brisbane. C. F. Cole (*Emu*, 1932, vol. 32, p. 94) recorded a Drongo near Melbourne on June 2, 1932. It was about the garden for three weeks and was quite tame. Presumably this report represents merely an unhappy navigational mischance. There are other records in *Emu* of winter sightings of Drongos at sites far from the north, but these refer to birds on the move.

Now that one definite straw is available, any further reports of Drongos as winter residents south of Mackay would be of great interest and may well give more clues to "the caprices of this curious bird".

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