

The Versatile Grey Thrush

Interest attaches to the suggestion by Mr. R. H. Green of Launceston (*Aust. Bird Bander*, June, 1966, p. 37) that the Grey Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*) may sometimes breed in immature plumage. Any such occurrence, however, must be rare, for in a long experience with the species, in various States and at all seasons, I have never met a case of the kind. On the other hand, I have been puzzled more than once by particular vocal performances on the part of immature Grey Thrushes.

As a youth in Central Victoria I once heard plaintive piping notes that were not familiar, and even on tracing them to their source—two sturdy small birds with streaked breasts—I was no wiser until I saw the two pipers being fed by a pair of adult Grey Thrushes. It seemed curious that a species possessing bold and melodious notes in maturity should use such plaintive (almost wailing) calls soon after leaving the nest.

Later, in Queensland, I was astonished by a very different example of vocalism on the part of a young Grey Thrush. On a day in early spring

the bird was hopping from ground to branches in a grove of eucalypts near Brisbane, and every now and then it poured out a most charming melody—not the resonant whistling notes (which are usually individual) but a beautiful song of soliloquy.

This was the most continuous and perhaps most engaging performance I had ever heard from a Grey Thrush; and it came from a bird whose breast bore the streaking of immaturity.

More than forty years passed before I heard a similar performance from a Grey Thrush; and this time, although the occasion was a hot day in late summer—with the sun beating down on a woodland west of Sydney—the melody was again continuous and very agreeable, but so slight as to merit being classed as a whisper-song.

It seemed to me that in this second case also the singer was an immature bird, but in the brief glimpse available one could not be certain.

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