

The Australian

BIRD BANDER

Habits Of Spotted Pardalotes

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The results of several years banding work on Spotted Pardalotes (*Pardalotus punctatus*) are analysed. The value of regular seasonal banding is evident, although lack of time restricted the number of visits each season. Some observations made during the study are described and an appeal is made for banders to consider these birds for species projects.

Numerous authors have written about nesting behaviour of the species. N. L. Roberts (1953) stated, as a result of observations by himself and others, that the male Spotted Pardalote takes the initiative in selecting the nesting site.

A summary of data concerning same breeding pairs banded and retrapped at nesting burrows is as follows:

- Case (1) One male occupied the same burrow for three successive seasons, each time with a different female. His mate of the third season had been banded during the previous season with another male at a burrow about 150 yards from this site.
- Case (2) The same pair occupied the same burrow for two successive seasons. The next season the burrow was destroyed before trapping commenced.
- Case (3) One male occupied the same burrow for two successive seasons each time with a different female. The same burrow was occupied by a different pair the next season.
- Case (4) A pair was retrapped at a new burrow within a few yards of their home of the previous season.
- Case (5) A female occupied the same burrow for two successive seasons with a

different male each season. The following season she and her mate of the previous year were retrapped at a new burrow within inches of the old one.

The evidence obtained in the first four instances, would support the observations that male Spotted Pardalotes do "take the initiative in selecting the nesting site". If this is so, what of Case (5)? Perhaps the female exerts more influence than hitherto credited to her! On the other hand, something may have happened to the male after the pair returned to the nesting site. A more dominant male may have "taken over" after selection and adoption of the particular location or the original male may have been the victim of a predator.

I would be interested to hear from any other bander who has similar nesting records.

Nestling pardalotes are rarely banded because interference, such as digging out burrows, is not permitted. However, if a burrow is conveniently situated for regular observation, a close watch may reveal the time the nestlings are about due to leave the burrow. At this stage I have found the nestlings near the entrance, eagerly awaiting the return of the parents with food.

On one occasion, I went to investigate a burrow where I had banded both adults three weeks earlier. As I bent to look into the burrow,

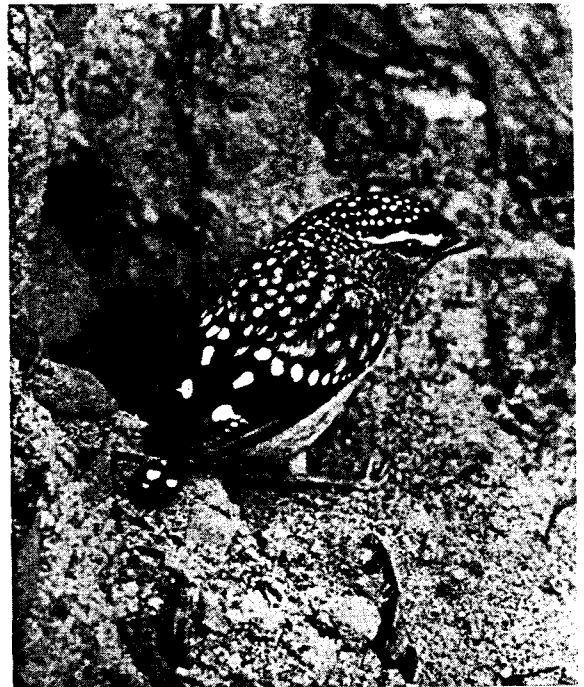
two fledgelings fluttered past my face which was then only a few inches from the entrance. They had apparently been sitting at the entrance awaiting their next meal. Neither could fly properly but fluttered to the ground a yard or two from the burrow. They were re-captured, banded and returned, head first into the burrow and prodded with a small stick until they were at least six inches from the entrance. The tunnel, like most belonging to pardalotes, was rather small and I doubt whether even these youngsters could turn in it until they reached the nesting chamber.

Shortly afterwards, the adult male arrived at the burrow with food. At the sight of the nestling's tail he withdrew his head from the entrance and looked about in apparent astonishment. He then entered the burrow and, from my point of observation, I was able to see his tail about four inches from the entrance where he paused for a moment or two before backing out, when he again glanced from side to side. He then re-entered the burrow, this time to disappear completely from view. One or two minutes later, he left the burrow and shortly afterwards the female returned with food. The nestlings were not seen again.

On another occasion, I placed a hand net over a burrow entrance in the hope that one of the adults would be caught, and then left the site to investigate another pair breeding about 20 yards away. Returning a few minutes later I found a female with a beak full of food, hanging on to the outside of the net and calling quietly. As I watched, two nestlings could be seen at the entrance. They had not been visible when I first looked into the tunnel. The female fed one or both through the mesh and flew off. Shortly afterwards the male arrived and perched in the tree opposite the burrow. At the sight of "dad", the two young birds, in their eagerness to get more food, fell into the net pocket.

Each was banded and returned head first into the burrow. I slowly withdrew, watching the entrance as I went. Soon one youngster appeared at the entrance and, without a pause, flew strongly to the tree where the male had perched. The second fledgeling then appeared, hesitated for a few moments, and with considerable vocal encouragement from the male flying nearby, it also reached the protection of the vegetation.

Observers have noted Spotted Pardalotes moving in large numbers, apparently on migration. When doing this, they usually travel



• Spotted Pardalote (male) at entrance to nesting burrow.

Photo: J. D. Waterhouse
(by courtesy of The Gould League of N.S.W.)

through the highest trees, presenting little hope for large-scale banding. There are no recorded recoveries of the species away from the banding site.

On 28 December 1958 while mist netting with Ray Lonnon at Cattai, N.S.W., two birds in adult male plumage and seven in juvenile plumage were caught.

During visits to the same locality in 1966/67 nets were set along the same water-course (in 1958 we had only one 30 foot by 4 foot net) and the details of pardalotes caught on each visit are set out in the following table:—

Date	Adult Males	Adult Females	Juveniles	Total
26.11.66	—	—	18	18
17.12.66	1	—	5	6
29.12.66	1	1	20	22
7.1.67	—	1	27	28
29.1.67	1	2	—	3
11.2.67	—	—	4	4
	3	4	74	81

An Unusual Catching Technique

Colour banding of juvenile Southern Fig-birds (*Sphecotheres vieilloti*) has been greatly assisted by their readiness to cooperate in the "walk-on" perching stick catching method.

The first requirement is a long light sapling or something else which can be handled reasonably easily. In our case a paper-bark (*Melaleuca sp.*) sapling about 25 feet long is used. My thumb and middle finger can just touch around the butt. Anything thicker than this is found to be unmanageable at this length. At the top end a few twigs are left but the remainder is trimmed to the bare pole. When the top end of the stick is moved slowly up the tree until it is in front of a perched young fig-bird these twigs seem to give it confidence. Then a gentle touch on the bird's breast is all that is needed to make the youngster step on to the top twigs. So perched, it is lowered quietly to the ground, lifted off, and banded.

They don't seem to mind being taken for a ride. After banding the young bird is replaced on

the catching stick and hoisted back to its original perch up the tree. Young fig-birds are very good subjects; they make no nonsense about going back to their position and seem to take it all in good part. Generally the birds are caught soon after they vacate the nest. In some cases, rather younger birds that have become too hot to stay right in the nest have also been induced to step on to the stick. When lifted up again they seem so glad to get home that they hop straight back on to the nest and stay put until, in several days, it is time for them to fly. Young birds of most other species at this stage of growth will not stay in their nest if they suspect that they are even being looked at. Sometimes the birds are perched just too high to reach with the 25 foot stick. Several have been caught by my mounting my saddle horse to gain height, but not all horses will accept the long wagging stick.

Some young Noisy Miners (*Myzantha melanocephala*) have been caught by the "walk-on" stick when only a day out of the nest, despite the great noise made by the adult Miners. However, after the first day out of the nest the young seem to take notice of their parents' cries and scramble up out of reach.

No doubt there are other species that can be induced to "walk-on". I would be interested to learn of such successes by other banders. Presumably the method will work only until young birds learn that all twigs are not the same, and although branches do sway normally, a continuous drop of 25 feet needs evasive action.

(Miss) Ella K. Pratt,
Reserve Creek,
Murwillumbah, N.S.W.

On 21 January 1967 a brief observing visit was made to the area and in 10 or 15 minutes no less than twenty pardalotes were seen coming in to drink. Some of these perched within three or four feet of us. All appeared to be in juvenile plumage and although a particular watch was kept for banded birds, none was seen.

While this area is obviously a favoured drinking location, no retraps have been taken despite the regularity of visits. I have never seen pardalotes coming in to drink in such numbers elsewhere.

Much remains to be learned about the breeding habits and movements of these fascinating and economically valuable birds. It is hoped that other banders will be able to add to our knowledge by carrying out projects on this species.

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Reference:

Roberts, N.L. (1953), "Choosing the Nest Site", *Emu* 53: 128-130.

SYDNEY MEETING

A scientific meeting will be held on Saturday, 15 July 1967 at 2.00 p.m. in the Hallstrom Theatre, Australian Museum, College Street, Sydney.

The programme for the meeting has not yet been finalised but you will be assured of an interesting and informative afternoon.

Members, friends and visitors are cordially invited to be present.