

# BIRD BANDER

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## Winter Area Behaviour of Drongos and Forest Kingfishers

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A Spangled Drongo *Chibia bracteata* banded here on 23 July 1964 whilst wintering at Wellington Point on Moreton Bay, Queensland, and then retrapped at the banding site during winter two years later, provided the first local proof of the repetitive nature of this seasonal behaviour (Robertson 1967).

Now there is more proof. A total of 25 such wintering Drongos has now been banded and additional retraps made at this site. All have been caught here during winter time between April and September inclusive. The garden seems to suit them and they are about in it much of each day during this period. This particular garden is far from formal in that it covers an acre and is more like bushland. It is dominated by two big gum trees (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*) one of 25 m and the other about 20 m. In Queensland this tree is known often as Blue Gum because of its bark colour, but in New South Wales as Red Gum on account of the red wood. Fortunately for observers, eye level in the house is half way up these big trees. Additionally, also on the lower levels, there are about 80 saplings from 10 to 15 m high, mainly gum and ironbark with some paperbarks and casuarinas. Red flowering grevilleas up to 10 m tall with similar sized banksias provide intermediate stages down to the many flowering native shrubs of grevillea, callistemon, leptospermum, hakea etc. situated nearer the house. The Drongos have ample ranging space for sallies from this garden as all the way to the tip of Wellington Point, about two km to the north,

there are many more large eucalypts and gardens.

In all this native vegetation the Drongos find plenty of insects, occasionally even on the lawns where they land sometimes, though generally, the insects are plucked from the ground by the flying bird while passing. The lemon coloured flowering heads of bottlebrush shape on the *Banksia integrifolia* are favourites and receive very thorough and detailed probing from the Drongos. These flower spikes seem to yield them much food, perhaps both nectar and insects.

In summer there are no Drongos here beyond an occasional bird on passage. In autumn one or more of them appears suddenly, just outside the lounge room window, on the perching stick over the birdbath and calls loudly in seeming excitement. After a short time of this calling a Drongo will fly down directly into the pull-string feeder trap and start to drink immediately. Their approach shows none of the cautious appraisal so usual with birds unfamiliar with the wire mesh structure containing the drinking tray (see photo, Robertson 1969).

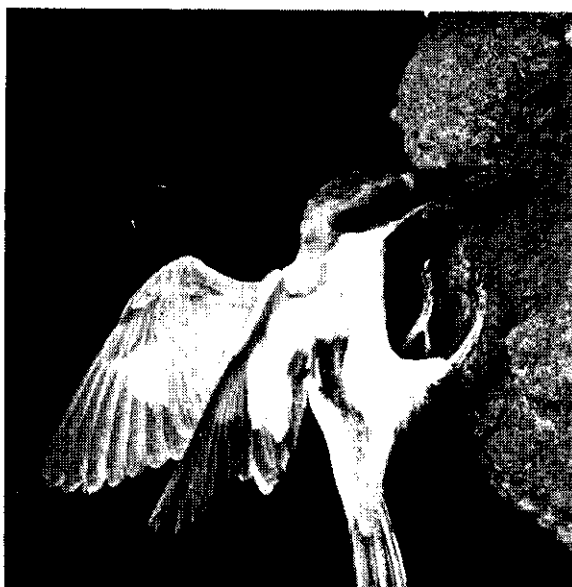
The winter of 1972 has been true to type with a party of Drongos visiting the sugar water feeder trap and bird bath many times a day. Their bands are seen clearly. It is unusual for two Drongos to be in the feeder together, though up to five more may be close waiting their turn. There seems to be a strictly enforced peek order. Often a Drongo will refuse entry to another Drongo, even though tolerating Mangrove Honeyeaters *Meliphaga fasciogularis* and Brown Honeyeaters *Gliciphila indistincta* in drinking with it.

When contesting the use of the feeder with a Noisy Friar-bird *Philemon corniculatus* a Spangled Drongo drew itself up to full height in opposition to the Friar-bird which crouched low to peck. The feathers along each side of the Drongo's head stood on end and bristled upwards and outwards, whilst those of the central tract from the forehead and over the crown and nape remained flat and smooth. The effect was rather dramatic. This posture with the accompanying harsh calls seemed to daunt the Friar-bird which departed. Both these birds have red eyes which in these times of stress gleam in the sunlight. That of the Friar-bird looked like a drop of blood as one of my watching visitors remarked.

Sometimes it is the Drongo that flies away from these confrontations with Friar-birds at the feeder. Birds of either of these species which happen to be individually very familiar with the feeder seem to count it as home territory and gain determination from this aspect.

Apparently Drongos find this bayside site with its mild climate and suitable habitat a satisfactory wintering area. Between 1966 and 1972 four individual Drongos have been retrapped during their return winter visits here. Of these, one bird banded 060-23810, on 23 July 1964 has been retrapped here during four later winters on 11 August 1966, 5 June 1967, 6 June 1968 and 9 June 1969. The last occasion was thus four years ten months seventeen days after banding. (Purchase 1970).

Another species, the Forest Kingfisher *Halcyon macleayi* which locally has generally the same occurrence pattern, has now provided the first proof of the same constancy of return to this favoured wintering area. In winter 1971 about half a dozen of these Kingfishers were noted as



• Forest Kingfisher alighting at nest entrance in termites' mound.

Photo: N. Chaffer

daily frequenting and hunting in a grass paddock adjoining an acre of grapevines. Nets set on their flight lines resulted in the weighing, measuring and banding of four of the group. The birds moved off in spring and were absent during summer 1971/72. However, in winter 1972 a party of Forest Kingfishers was again working this same area daily. A male, 050-53947, banded there on 29 June 1971, was retrapped at the banding site on 18 July 1972, one year nineteen days later.

Unfortunately, the summer location of any of these banded Drongos or Forest Kingfishers has not yet been determined. Thus the extent of their seasonal movement is unknown.

### References

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