

LAUGHING KOOKABURRA ROBS BELL MINER NEST

Smith and Robertson (1978) report a failure rate of 43 per cent of Bell Miners *Manorina melanophrys* nests, while Clarke (1988) attributes 50 per cent of those losses to predation. Lists of potential predators which may account for those nest failures are available (Smith and Robertson 1978; Clarke 1988). Nevertheless, direct evidence of nest predation are scanty (Falconer 1984). The lack of direct evidence of nest predation is quite understandable since attacks on nests are likely to be very transient phenomena (Curio and Regelmann 1986).

One of the potential predators of Bell Miner nests is the Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae* (Clarke 1988; Caswell 1987; Aston and Aston 1988). Here I present results of a direct observation of predation upon a Bell Miner nest by a Laughing Kookaburra.

On 8 April, 1990 I was observing a Bell Miner nest from a hide in the Sir Colin Mackenzie Zoological Park at Healesville, Victoria. The nest had two chicks about five or six days old. At 1024 h the breeding female arrived at the nest and fed the chicks, leaving the nest unattended soon afterwards. At 1025 h a general alarm call was uttered by many birds in the colony, and while the birds were still calling a Laughing Kookaburra arrived at the nest. It immediately pecked one chick and introduced it into the mouth, then pecked the second one and also introduced it into the mouth; it did not seem to swallow them immediately. The whole attack lasted no more than eight seconds. After the Kookaburra took both chicks, it flew up to a branch 12 m from the nest, presumably to complete swallowing its prey.

While the Kookaburra was taking the chicks from the nest, 4–5 Bell Miners mobbed it all around, uttering loud distress calls. Nevertheless, none of the Bell Miners made contact with the predator, always keeping a distance of no less than 60–100 cm.

Once the Kookaburra was perched on the branch, it was pursued and mobbed by the whole group of Bell Miners (no less than five birds) for 20 seconds, then flew up to another tree 20 m from the nest being pursued by only one Bell Miner. The Bell Miner attacked the perched Kookaburra in the usual way that Bell Miners mob potential nest predators, i.e. swooping from side to side while approaching the predator from behind. The Bell Miner kept attacking for about 10 seconds until the Kookaburra left the colony.

The whole sequence of events lasted 38 seconds which confirms the general assumption that nest predation is a very transient phenomenon.

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