

PURPLE SWAMPHEN *Porphyrio porphyrio* KILLING A NOISY MINER *Manorina melanocephala* NESTLING

JAMES A. FITZSIMONS

School of Ecology and Environment, Deakin University,
221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, Victoria 3125

Received: 26 June 2002

This note describes the killing of a Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala* nestling by a Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* at Renmark, South Australia. At 0730 hours on 9 October 2001 on a property adjoining the Renmark Riverfront Caravan Park and the Murray River (34°10'S, 140°44'E), the observer's attention was drawn to four adult Noisy Miners noisily mobbing a Purple Swamphen. The Miners were harassing the Swamphen, often approaching within a distance of between 1 to 2 metres, both from the ground and from low branches of surrounding trees (*Allocasuarina* sp.).

The Swamphen, which appeared unperturbed by the honeyeaters, was observed holding a nestling Noisy Miner in its bill and repeatedly striking it against the ground, in a similar manner to that of a Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae*, but not as powerfully. The nestling was obviously dead at this stage but the actions were repeated for a further 30 seconds.

When approached by the observer it ran, with fledgling in bill, towards the river and out of sight. It is not clear how the Swamphen captured the nestling and no nests were observed in surrounding trees.

Dow (1977) has previously reported the mobbing of gallinules by Noisy Miners, although the species was not specified in that instance.

Purple Swamphens have previously been recorded taking 'young birds' (Oliver 1974), ducklings of various species (van Tets 1965; Lowe 1966; McKenzie 1967; references within Egan 1992), Common Blackbirds *Turdus merula* (McKenzie 1967) and Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*

(Egan 1992), while Carroll (1966) found bird fragments in an individual Swamphen's gizzard. However, the taking of a Noisy Miner nestling appears not to have been previously recorded in literature reviews of Swamphen diets (Marchant and Higgins 1993) or in recent studies of Miner nestling predators (Arnold 2000).

While Swamphens have been described by Lowe (1966 p.287) as 'attacking Muscovy Duck (*Cairina moschata*) ducklings about the head and nape', the killing of a young bird in the manner described above appears to bear greater similarities to the 'shaking and striking (of a Common Starling) against the mud' described by Egan (1992 p.84).

Thanks to Grant Palmer, Michael Mathieson and an anonymous referee for comments on a draft.

REFERENCES

- Arnold, K. E. (2000). Strategies of the cooperatively breeding Noisy Miner to reduce nest predation. *Emu* 100: 280-285.
- Carroll, A. L. K. (1966). Food habits of Pukeko (*Porphyrio melanotus* Temminck). *Notornis* 13: 133-144.
- Dow, D. D. (1977). Indiscriminate interspecific aggression leading to almost sole occupancy of space by a single species of bird. *Emu* 77: 115-121.
- Egan, K. (1992). Purple Swamphen's predation on European Starling. *Aust. Birds* 26: 84.
- Lowe, V. T. (1966). Notes on the Musk-duck *Biziura lobata*. *Emu* 65: 279-290.
- Marchant, S. and Higgins, P. J. (Eds) (1993). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, volume 2, Raptors to Lapwings'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)
- McKenzie, H. R. (1967). Foods of the Pukeko. *Notornis* 14: 41-42.
- Oliver, W. R. B. (1974). 'New Zealand Birds'. (Reed: Wellington.)
- van Tets, G. F. (1965). Eastern Swamphen takes a downy from a pair of Chestnut Teal. *Emu* 64: 100.