

These observations provide preliminary data on foraging success in the Laughing Kookaburra in a suburban habitat. Comparable observations need to be made of strike success in a variety of microhabitats in order to investigate how such 'disturbed' habitats influence habitat quality via strike success and/or a greater range of food availability.

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BOOK REVIEW

Australian Magpie: Ecology and Behaviour of an Unusual Songbird

Gisela Kaplan. 2004. Australian Natural History Series. CSIRO Publishing. Paperback, 152 pp., colour illustrations. ISBN 064309681. \$39.95 plus postage.

Professor Kaplan is a researcher for the Centre for Neuroscience and Animal Behaviour at the University of New England, New South Wales and this book is the result of ten years research into magpies. Although it is very detailed, even the most amateur birdwatcher will easily digest the wealth of fascinating information about this best known and widely distributed Australian singer.

The ten chapters cover origins and classification, anatomy, diet and feeding habits, territoriality and dispersal, bonding and breeding, physical and social development, agonistic and cooperative behaviour, song production, communication and mimicry, magpies and humans, winding up with the success of magpies. Numerous black and white photographs illustrate each section of the book and colour photographs do justice to this handsome bird. Diagrams explain other parts to make for easy understanding. The caption to the photographs in Figure 9.3 ascribes an expression of tenderness to a hand-raised juvenile with which this reviewer happily agrees. References are given throughout with a number relevant to the full list at the end of the book.

Because magpies are so well known we probably accept them as not being anything special but their whole social system is diverse and complex. Probably most of us know that breeding pairs are accompanied by one or more helpers and that they are present at all times. Not so. There are four marginal groupings and one dominant breeding group,

while the four seasonal maps taken from the *New Atlas of Australian Birds* show wide seasonal fluctuations, with the widest spread in winter and least in summer.

The young that stay in the parental territory are usually female, the males joining other groups. This is contrary to the usual dispersal patterns of cooperatively breeding birds where the female leaves the parental territory and the males stay with the parents to assist with defence and rearing of the young.

The section on song reveals the real superiority of this bird, possibly one of the best singers in Australia and perhaps internationally. It is also a mimic of other species as clearly shown by the sonogram of a magpie mimicking the duetting of two kookaburras.

The section dealing with interaction with humans explains why magpies attack and how to avoid them. Magpies recognize and tolerate those who live in their territory, others being potential enemies. The wisest way for strangers to avoid attack is simply to avoid those territories occupied by breeding birds. Simple?

I detected only one very minor typo — the omission of an 'o' in 'too' in the caption accompanying Figure 10.2.

This is a book that will be treasured by anyone even slightly interested in this ubiquitous songster, whose song lasting even longer than an hour without a break, seems to be sung with joy.

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