

## MATE GUARDING IN THE MAGPIE-LARK

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Socially monogamous Magpie-larks *Grallina cyanoleuca* were studied to evaluate whether the potential for sperm competition was reduced by mate guarding or frequent copulation with the mate. Breeding among nearby pairs was sufficiently asynchronous to generate opportunities for extra-pair copulations, but frequent intra-pair copulation was not evident. The mean intra-pair and pair-to-nest distances were significantly smaller in the female's fertile period than at other times in the breeding cycle. Males were significantly more likely than females to both pursue and approach their mate, particularly during the fertile period, and thereby maintain or reduce the intra-pair distance. Males thus regulated the intra-pair distance. Eighty-three per cent of territorial intrusions by conspecifics elicited aggressive approaches by the paired, territorial male. Intrusions did not elicit male aggression significantly more often during the female's fertile period, but they did cause an immediate reduction in the intra-pair distance more frequently at this time. Collectively these observations suggest that male Magpie-larks exhibited mate guarding with the potential to reduce the chance of cuckoldry. Some alternative explanations for the behavioural trends observed are reviewed and considered less likely.