

# **SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR OF TWO FREE-RANGING CHICKS OF AUSTRALIAN BRUSH-TURKEY *Alectura lathami***

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To date, chicks of the Australian Brush-turkey *Alectura lathami* have been believed to live solitarily during the first months of their lives. They hatch asynchronously in incubation mounds of leaf litter and receive no parental care. Upon digging themselves out of the mound, they disperse into dense understorey. This hatching process, their camouflaged plumage, lack of loud calls and large distances between incubation mounds would seem unlikely to facilitate encounters between chicks. Our observations represent the first accounts of social behaviour and time budgets of young Brush-turkey chicks in the wild. One radio-tagged chick, approximately three weeks old, spent 20 per cent of the observation time with another similar-aged wild chick, often separating and meeting again. Occasionally, both roosted on the same tree. They remained within a small area of rainforest, where they fed frequently on freshly fallen fruit, especially Watkins Figs *Ficus watkinsiana*. The chicks engaged in social behaviour, such as wing flap runs or aggressive pecking, and one followed the other when changing feeding sites. When adults were nearby, both the chicks and the adults ignored each other, confirming that megapode chicks form no bonds with adults in the wild. These observations suggest that young Brush-turkey chicks form a loose two-chick group occasionally and that this occurs most likely in areas of a rich food supply.