

Mating of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo

D. I. SMEDLEY

During a banding study at Deepwater Park, East Hills, N.S.W., I often observed in summer Fan-tailed Cuckoos *Cuculus pyrrhophanus*.

At least three birds were present on 18 December 1976, two in adult plumage and one immature as described by Disney (1974). The brown scalloped upperparts, mottled brown-grey underparts, and distinctive lighter buff edging to the wing coverts and secondaries of the immature bird were observed through 8 x 40 binoculars. One adult-plumaged bird frequently gave a mournful, downward-inflecting call (The "trill" of Marchant and Hohn 1980), and occasionally a single high-pitched note (the "whistle" of Marchant and Hohn).

On one occasion, one of the adult cuckoos was heard giving the single note at about 10-15 second intervals. The immature bird responded to the call by flying to a branch about nine metres from the first bird. When the immature

bird landed, the calling bird flew to it, landing about a body length away. The adult paused momentarily, then mounted the immature. The immature adopted the female mating position with the tail slightly arched and the wings lowered under the body so that the tips almost touched. The adult mounted slightly to the left of the immature's back and steadied himself with small movements of his partly spread wings. Copulation was very quick, lasting only about four seconds. The adult male hopped back to the branch, paused briefly, then flew off in the direction from where he had come; the younger bird followed there after.

The two birds moved about within the vicinity for a further twenty minutes. Apart from one brief occasion when they perched on the same *Acacia* branch, I observed no further contact between the two.

Smithers (1977) described the feeding of one Fan-tailed Cuckoo by another. Unfortunately, he noted but did not describe the call given by what he presumed to be the male bird. Marchant and Hohn (1980) also reported courtship feeding and were convinced that the "whistle" call is only given by the male. During the course of two hours observation, I did not observe courtship feeding nor hear the female give any call at all.

This observation describes the mating of an adult male and immature female Fan-tailed Cuckoo and reinforces the description of the call of the male Fan-tailed Cuckoo given by Marchant and Hohn (1980).

References

- Disney, H. J. De S. (1974), *Bird in the Hand* (ed. S. G. Lane), The Bird Banders Assoc. of Australia, Sydney.
 Marchant, S. and O. Hohn (1980), 'Field Notes on the Fan-tailed Cuckoo', *Emu* 80: 77-80.
 Smithers, C. N. (1977), 'An instance of one Fantailed Cuckoo Feeding another', *Aust. Birds* 12: 8.



● Australian Kestrel with hood fitted showing construction details.

D. I. Smedley
 21 Ula Crescent,
 Baulkham Hills, N.S.W. 2153.