

A CICADABIRD IN ADELAIDE

PAT BOWIE

Accepted December 1978

The Cicadabird *Coracina tenuirostris* frequents the upper foliage of trees in forests in north and eastern Australia (normally as far as eastern Victoria). In the north-west of its range it inhabits mangroves, monsoon forests and paperbark swamps, occasionally venturing into adjacent open eucalypt forests; to the east it inhabits tall coastal and wet mountain sclerophyll forests, rainforests, gallery forests and mangroves, occasionally visiting adjacent eucalypt forest and scrub. The bird migrates to the south during spring, and returns northwards again in late summer and autumn. There are no previous published records in South Australia for this species.

The bird was seen on several occasions between 20 and 22 November 1978 when it was either in my garden or in the immediate vicinity. The area throughout is thickly wooded with *Eucalyptus odorata*, and it was seen only in the canopies of these trees. It was initially found when I investigated prolonged scolding sounds from White-plumed Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus penicillatus*; on subsequent occasions it was located by similar scolding sounds. The honeyeaters were never seen to attack the bird, which appeared to ignore them. In silhouette the bird first appeared as rather Starling-like, though larger, and with a medium-length tail; a robust bird, about the size of an Australian Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*. Its flight within a tree and method of alighting was also very Starling-like, as was its stance. It sat actively peering around, craning its neck, and turning and twisting it so that it was able to look all around it, without changing its stance. Every 10 to 15 seconds it moved within the tree or to an adjacent one and recommenced its search. On different occasions I saw it take a large grub or caterpillar in a quick movement, afterwards shaking it a few times. Its flight between trees was direct and rapid, with fairly fast wing beats. There was a suggestion of undulation in the flight, but no gliding between wing beats. Confirmation of the bird as a male Cicadabird was made by Shane Parker, Curator of Birds, South Australian Museum, on 22 November 1978.

Viewed with 7 x 50 binoculars, in varying light, and from distances ranging between 6 and 8 m, the dominant colour appeared to be a medium grey, darker than the Black-faced

Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*. The flight-feathers were black with grey edgings, and there was a conspicuous black stripe on the leading edge of the wing. A notable feature, characteristic of the adult male Cicadabird but absent in the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and Little Cuckoo-shrike, was a row of black spots on the median upper wing-coverts (this was subsequently confirmed by examination of museum specimens). When perched, the bird folded its tail, which then appeared from above to be grey with a black tip, and from below to have a series of large black and pale grey crescents along it (actually due to the pale tipping of the outer rectrices). When the bird flew, however, it spread the tail to reveal that only the two median rectrices were mainly grey, the rest being mainly black. When the bird was perched, the tip of the folded tail was rounded, appearing as two crescents meeting in the centre. The rump had faint scalloping markings in a paler grey. There was a black face mask which did not extend above the eye, and I noticed a broad black line running between the eye and bill, tapering towards the bill. The bill was black, medium-length and straight. The upper mandible appeared to be slightly hooked. The eye was large, very dark, possibly black, and shining. The legs were medium length and black. The overall impression given by the plumage was that it was soft and smooth, very owl-like. The bird was silent throughout my observations of it; however, I found it on one occasion after following up a faint buzzing sound which lasted for about five seconds, and was rather cicada-like in quality. The bird was sitting still in a *E. odorata* and was not being mobbed at that time.

I consulted the Bureau of Meteorology regarding the weather pattern for the period 17-19 November, when I had been absent from Adelaide. On the 17th the weather had been hot, with a large High extending a ridge into South Australia, bringing a strong northerly airstream from Queensland overland into South Australia. There was a large complex Low over Western Australia, and a weak Low south of Kangaroo Island. The Low centred south of Kangaroo Island moved rapidly to the South-East, and the associated cold front lying on the 17th from Forrest to Tasmania moved through the State late on Friday and early on Saturday, 17 and 18 November.