

INTERFERENCE BY GALAHS AT NEST SITES OF OTHER PARROTS

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This note describes two attempts by Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla* to keep parrots of other species from their respective nesting hollows.

OBSERVATIONS

On 15 August 1978, whilst walking along Edward Creek about one km S of Nilpinna HS (28° 29'S, 135° 55'E), my attention was drawn to the top of a large River Red Gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* by the screeching of four Galahs. They were jostling each other around a vertical stump about eight metres above the ground, near the top of the tree. As I approached I noticed two Bourke's Parrots *Neophema bourkii* perched in a small Mulga *Acacia aneura* 10 metres from the River Red Gum. The Galahs were perched on the edge of the stump and on nearby branches, constantly jostling and screeching, but flew off noisily as I approached. The Bourke's Parrots remained in the Mulga, even when I approached the Red Gum and climbed to where the Galahs had been. When I reached the stump I discovered that it was hollow to a depth of ca 600 mm and contained five small white eggs of the Bourke's Parrot resting on a layer of decayed woody material. The hollow was ca 120 mm in diameter; this was almost constant from the entrance down to the nest. When I descended from the tree the two Bourke's Parrots were still perched where I had first seen them, and they allowed an approach to within five metres before flying to another Mulga close to the Red Gum. There is no doubt that this was the nest of the Bourke's Parrots, as on my return three days later I flushed one bird of this species from the nest.

Three months later, on 21 November 1978, whilst walking along the bank of The Neales at the southern end of Hookeys WH, four km SW of Oodnadatta (27° 36'S, 135° 26'E), I was reminded of the behaviour of these Galahs by the behaviour of several other Galahs and one female-phase Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus*. The Cockatiel was flying around a dead eucalypt, *E. cf. camaldulensis*, which was occupied by the Galahs, and continued flying around the tree and screeching until all the Galahs had left. The Cockatiel then entered a hole in the side of a vertical fork 10 metres above the ground. I watched the tree for 10 minutes, but the bird did not reappear, even when I tapped the trunk near ground level with a large stone.

It was impossible for me to investigate the hole more closely as the tree was too flimsy to climb and was also overhanging the waterhole. Further observation was forestalled by approaching darkness.

Two days later I again visited this area and once more saw a female-phase Cockatiel being kept from the hole in the tree by two Galahs. On one occasion the Cockatiel was actually chased from the hole by a Galah and flew away calling loudly, but returned almost immediately to perch three metres away on an upright dead branch. I observed these birds for more than 10 minutes from a distance of 150 metres and neither species showed any signs of leaving. I then approached to 50 metres before both Galahs flew off. The Cockatiel appeared undisturbed by my presence and remained on the dead upright branch. After a few minutes I began to back off and within 10 seconds the Cockatiel flew to the hole and disappeared inside tail first.

Even though I was unable to climb the tree to confirm breeding of the Cockatiel, I am confident that this tree contained a nest of this species. There is also no doubt that the female-phase Cockatiel was being deliberately kept from the nest by the Galahs. The Cockatiel was only just able to fit through the entrance to the hole and I think it very unlikely that the Galahs would have been able to enter. A male Cockatiel was not seen on either occasion.

DISCUSSION

It is doubtful if the actions of the Galahs prevented the breeding of these other species. In the case of the Bourke's Parrots one of the eggs had hatched before my second visit to the nest on 18 August. I again visited this nest on 19 September 1978 and no Bourke's Parrots were seen in the area. On this occasion a flattened, consolidated bed of very fresh green eucalypt leaves covered the original lining and the nest had apparently been taken over by Galahs, one of which was seen nearby. As the Bourke's Parrots had managed to hatch one egg, I think it likely that they also managed to hatch the other four and to rear at least some of the young, and that they had left the nest prior to 19 September.

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