COPULATION BEHAVIOUR IN A MAGPIE-LARK PAIR IMMEDIATELY AFTER DEATH OF THE YOUNG. The Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca* commences its breeding season in early August (Robinson 1947; Tingay 1974). Despite a number of detailed examinations of Magpie-lark behaviour (Aston 1988; Byrne 1985; McCulloch 1987; Robinson 1947; Tingay 1974) there appear to be no reports of this species' copulatory behaviour. The female lays 3–4 eggs and incubation is shared by both birds (McCulloch 1987; Robinson 1947; Tingay 1974). The eggs hatch after 17–18 days (Tingay 1974). Both parents feed and brood the young (McCulloch 1987; Robinson 1947; Tingay 1974). The nestling period lasts 19–23 days after which the young fledge, staying within the nesting tree for up to four days, before flying about the territory (Tingay 1974).

Three pairs of Magpie-larks have been observed throughout the breeding season for three consecutive years at Gretel Crescent Reserve, Hallett Cove, South Australia. Each pair was observed for two hours a day, six days a week. On 3 August 1993 one pair began nest building by carrying mud to the nest site every 10–15 minutes, mostly in the morning. The nest was built in the fork of the upper third of a mature eucalypt tree. Nest building continued until 26 September, with only occasional repairs after this date, and incubation commenced on 27 September. The number of eggs laid was not observed. On 11 October the parents were observed to carry food to the nest every 5–15 minutes. On 16 October two chicks were observed in the nest, but on the next day one of the chicks was found dead at the base of the tree. By 29 October the second chick had fledged and left the nesting tree.

On 30 October at approximately sunrise (0516 h) the remaining live fledgling was observed being taken by a dog. The dog carried its prey in its mouth for about 20 m before consuming it. The parents witnessed this incident, giving persistent ‘pee’ calls (Robinson 1947; Tingay 1974), whilst perched in their nesting tree. Within five minutes the pair flew to a wide open area where they were observed lying together on the ground. The female was underneath the male and partly concealed. She was not standing, but appeared to be either on her back or her belly. The male’s wings were spread and there appeared to be cloacal contact. The birds were briefly interrupted, flew a short distance and returned to their apparently copulatory behaviour. They remained in this position for about one minute.

Approximately 20 minutes later the birds were observed carrying mud and other nesting material to the original nest. This behaviour was observed to continue for the next 11 days, mostly in the morning.
On 11 November the parents commenced incubation. Mud carrying was discontinued, except for occasional repairs.

On 26 November the parents were seen carrying food to the nest. On 1 December two chicks were observed. By 15 December both chicks had fledged and spent four days in the nesting tree before following their parents into the rest of their territory. The parents continued to feed the young for another three weeks. The young developed adult female plumage. One left the territory in late February 1994 and the other did not leave the territory until early August when the parents began nest building.

This rapid onset of reproductive behaviour in the Magpie-lark after the death of a chick appears not to have been previously reported.

REFERENCES


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