

OBSERVATIONS OF MALE COMMON KOEL AT MAGILL AND WATTLE PARK.

The Common Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* is a breeding migrant to Australia, usually being found in northern and eastern Australia from the Kimberley area in Western Australia to the south coast of New South Wales during August to March (Pizzey and Knight 1997). It is usually found in leafy fruiting trees and is wary and elusive (Pizzey and Knight 1997).

At about 0630 h on 10 January 2002, I noticed the distinctive calls of a male Common Koel (Pizzey and Knight 1997) near Norwood High School at Magill some 7 km E of Adelaide GPO. Conditions were still and warm. I traced the loud, slow, repeated 'cooee' calls to a thicket of dense vegetation that consisted of a 15 m high Port Jackson fig *Ficus rubiginosa* and several smaller trees and shrubs located on the northern boundary of the school grounds. The call could be heard distinctly echoing from a three-storey school building 250–300 m to the south. The initial part of the call had a flute-like quality. The second part was higher-pitched and varied in pitch and volume, sometimes louder and shriller than earlier calls. The calls were uttered at fairly regular intervals—several times a minute. The bird remained calling but hidden for approximately 20 minutes. Later that morning, Barry and Ruby Hutchins observed a male Common Koel (red eye visible) in a eucalypt tree not far from the rear of the High School (B. Hutchins, pers. comm.).

At 0610 h on 11 January 2002, calls were again heard near the Port Jackson fig mentioned above. The tree was bearing hardish, green fruit with some softer brownish fruit on the ground underneath. Conditions were cool with a light south-westerly breeze. A bird with black plumage, slim build and long tail was seen briefly flying into the fig tree from other trees (about 10–15 m distant) at a height of about 10 m. Its shape was similar to adult Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes *Coracina novaehollandiae* observed perching and flying nearby, but appeared longer in the tail and overall. Over a 20-minute period the calling bird moved between several trees in streets and gardens west of the school. Although visually elusive, it called loudly and incessantly (as on the previous day). At the time of its presumed departure from the fig's location, alarm calls of Noisy Miners *Manorina melanocephala* were heard nearby. Shortly after, the bird was located

perching about 30 m above the ground partly concealed by foliage in the crown of a flowering river red gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. Its location was made obvious by its calls and mobbing Noisy Miners. It remained stationary for about 3–4 minutes. Seen from directly underneath, approximately three-quarters of the bird's underparts, including throat, were visible and appeared to be black. The bird then flew to the south-west, generally away from the observer (who had moved a short distance from under the tree canopy), revealing a long rounded tail and tapered wings. The flight was direct with fairly shallow, fast wing beats. Its tail length in proportion to body length, and flight characteristics, were somewhat like a Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus*. This time the bird was seen in flight for about five seconds across a distance of about 50 m in the open before disappearing behind roof-tops. It was again heard calling, probably from a 20 m white cedar *Melia azedarach* in a backyard. Several agitated Noisy Miners and Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen* flew into this tree. After 2–3 minutes the latter birds simultaneously flew west or south-west (away from the observer) apparently in pursuit of the koel. Within a minute the 'cooee' calls resumed from about 100 m to the south-east in or near dense 10–15 m lilly-pilly *Acmena* sp. trees behind houses (no fruit evident), the koel seemingly having followed a circuitous route to elude other birds.

During these sightings, all visible parts of the bird appeared black. Light was fairly dull, the sun not having emerged above the horizon. The calls matched those of the previous morning as described above.

A resident passing by commented that he had heard the same calls, which he thought might have been a peacock, over the past four to five days.

During 0800–0900 h the next day, the Port Jackson fig, described earlier, was watched from a distance of 30 m with the sun behind me. Conditions were cool with a gentle southerly breeze. No koel calls were heard. After 20 minutes a male Common Koel briefly appeared for 10–15 seconds in the foliage of a small, (10 m tall) narrow common cypress pine *Cupressus sempervirens* and an entwining grape vine *Vitis* sp. to the front of the Port Jackson fig. Although it was partly obscured by foliage, I obtained a clear view of the front one-third of the bird in

full sunlight with the aid of 10x15 binoculars from a distance of 25 m. Deep black plumage, red eye and a pale, grey bill were observed. The bird disappeared into the foliage for a short while then flew into the fig tree. In this flight of about 5 m, glossy bluish-black upperparts—not as shiny or blue as those of a Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*—and a long, slightly fanned tail were noticed.

Several subsequent observations of a single koel occurred in the vicinity of Branson Reserve, Wattle Park, 1–1.5 km SSW of the earlier sightings. At 0555 h on 14 January 2002, I was woken by quickly repeated ‘cooee’ calls presumed to be the Common Koel. The calls ceased before I had left the house to investigate. At 1925 h on 16 January, loud repeated ‘cooeee’ calls, as heard on the first occasion on 10 January, were traced to a dense deciduous tree in a private garden immediately north of Branson Reserve. These calls persisted for about 10 minutes. Subsequently, a large, slim, long-tailed, black, cuckoo-like bird flew SW directly overhead. A different call—a rising ‘koel koel koel koel’—was heard once in the general location at about 1910 h (preceded by Noisy Miner and New Holland Honeyeater *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* alarm calls). This was consistent with an audio-cassette recording of a Common Koel played shortly after for comparison (Buckingham and Jackson 1992).

Before 0530 h on 21 January 2002, repetitive ‘cooeee’ calls were heard from one of a group of 20 m tall lemon-scented gums *Eucalyptus citriodora* near Kensington Road, about 200 m N of Branson Reserve. Subsequently, two fruiting Port Jackson figs were noted approximately 50–100 m to the west near the intersection of Kensington and Penfold Roads. From a point near the northern boundary of the reserve, the calls were heard faintly echoing off houses south of the reserve at least 300 m away from the calling bird. The calling bird later shifted to dense vegetation in a front garden immediately south of Branson Reserve—the calls were the same as on the last occasion. It was then briefly glimpsed flying south from this location pursued by a Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata*. Conditions were cool, fine and still. On the other occasions they were fine, cool to mild, and with slight to moderate south-easterly breezes. Members of my family residing at Wattle Park, 100m W of Branson Reserve, reported hearing

an unseen koel on several other occasions, from 13 January, possibly earlier, to about 17 January. The bird was mostly heard briefly calling in the evening and once in the early afternoon.

R. Attwood reported a male Common Koel calling incessantly and feeding on figs in a garden at Kensington Park on 10–11 January 2002 (SAOA 2002).

Both Magill and Wattle Park are just inside the eastern edge of the Adelaide suburbs. The two localities of the koel observations are characterised by low-density detached housing with well-established garden and street plantings and an open cover of trees about 15–20 m high, mainly of exotic or Australian native trees from other States. The Magill locality contains river red gums (up to 30 m). Orchard trees with ripe or ripening fruit were more numerous in gardens at Magill. In Wattle Park, however, eight native fig trees, comprising Port Jackson fig and possibly one Moreton Bay fig *Ficus macrophylla* were noted within a 500 m radius of Branson Reserve. Most of them were bearing, mainly green, fruit.

The observer is familiar with the Common Koel, especially its calls, from visits to the Sydney area. One line of speculation is that the vagrant may have been displaced from habitat on the east coast of Australia by the numerous large bushfires in that area in the weeks preceding the above observations. This is the first record of a Common Koel for South Australia (G. Carpenter, pers. comm.).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Andrew Crompton (Biodiversity Manager, City of Burnside) with plant identification.

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Received 23 January 2002; accepted 15 October 2002