

## Bird Notes

# Sallying behaviour by Varied Sittella

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The Varied Sittella, *Daphoenositta chrysoptera* is a small, arboreal, gregarious insectivore that forages mainly on large branches and trunks of eucalypts, especially on bark of dead branches of live trees, and on smaller branches and twigs, occasionally amongst foliage and rarely on the ground. (Higgins & Peter 2002).

On 12 March 2006 at Darwents Waterhole (36° 25' S, 140° 20' E) c. 36 km south of Keith in the South East of SA, I observed a group of nine Varied Sittellas for about five minutes foraging, almost continuously, in the upper storey of a unidentified eucalypt. Five of the birds were using a technique that is unusual for this species, sallying for insects swarming c. 2 m above the top of the tree. The five birds involved in the sallying behaviour were both males and females. The remaining four birds foraged in the 'typical' sittella manner, described in Higgins & Peter (2002), as gleaning from the surface of the trunk and branches. According to Higgins & Peter (2002) the species main method of foraging is by gleaning and probing, but it will occasionally sally, hang, pull or flutter-chase. They reported on two detailed studies of the foraging behaviour of Varied Sittellas which included sallying at low frequencies, 3% at Wollomombi Falls (NSW) and 4% at Jandakot (WA), the other detailed studies referred to failed to record this behaviour, Tullis, Calver & Wooller (1982) recorded hawking for this species at 4% of total foraging behaviour while Brooker, Braithwaite & Estbergs (1990) in a study of the foraging behaviours of insectivorous and nectarivorous birds found no incidences of this species

sallying or hawking. An apparently incidental record was made by Crawford (1994) of five or six Varied Sittellas hawking for insects.

It is difficult to determine from the literature the definition of the behaviours described as "sallying" and "hawking". Higgins, Peter & Steele (2001) replaced the term hawking with sallying as the HANZAB series progressed (Sid Cowling pers. comm.). I prefer the stance taken by Tzaros (2005), where sallying is defined as a "foraging technique used by birds, whereby they fly from a perch to attack a food item, e.g. an insect, on any substrate, eventually returning to the same or another perch", whereas hawking is defined as a "foraging technique used by birds, whereby they attack aerial prey, e.g. insects, in continuous flight". In the context of this short note, I have used the sallying definition of Tzaros (2005) to describe the behaviour of the birds, and would like to make note of the need for consistency in the definition of terms used to describe foraging behaviour.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I would like to thank Sid Cowling (Birds Australia), and Jonathan Starks for their help, Gavin Jackson and Bryan Haywood for their comments on a draft, Chris Tzaros for discussion on the foraging methods, and the journal editors for suggested changes.

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