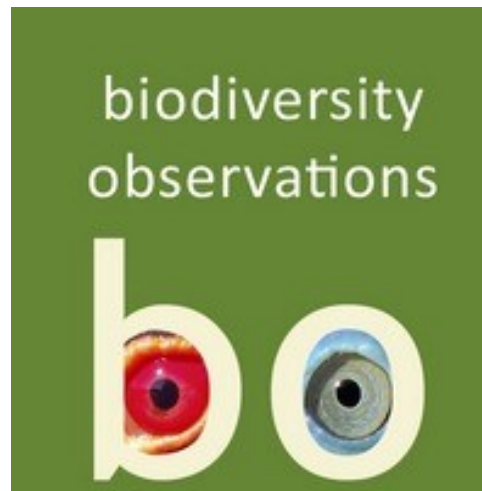


Use of human hair as nesting material in an Australian passerine, the Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*

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Use of human hair as nesting material in an Australian passerine, the Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*

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Abstract

A broad range of avian taxa are known to incorporate mammalian hair and fur into their nest materials and at least two reported observations involve birds using human hair. This note reports behaviour of an Australian passerine, the Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis* purposefully undertaking repeat visits to the same site to collect strands of human hair to supplement the structure of its nest. Apart from demonstrating ingenuity in this species, the observations expand our limited knowledge of avian use of human hair.

Observation

The Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis* is a common medium-sized passerine endemic to the Australian mainland (Higgins et al. 2006). On 12 October 2024, an individual was observed repeatedly returning to the same outdoor area of a holiday resort in Twin Waters, south-eastern Queensland, Australia. More focused observations showed that it was visiting a door mat and extracting materials from it. The door mat was found to contain several long strands of human hair and observations through binoculars confirmed that the bird was

extracting those hair strands (Figure 1). Within 30 min, six separate visits were observed. In all cases, the bird was relatively undisturbed by passersby as close as 3 m away. Following its sixth visit, it was followed to its nest approximately 150 m away, which confirmed that collected materials were being used to line the nest.



Figure 1: The Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis* holding a human hair extracted from a door mat. In the inset, the image contrast is increased. Photograph by M. Mo.

Discussion

Nests built by Pied Butcherbirds are typically deep, open cup-shaped structures comprising mostly of sticks and twigs, as well as leaves, bark and vines, and lined with rootlets, grass, mammalian fur and feathers (Campbell 1900, Le Souëf 1902, Hill 1911, Tarr 1961). The observations reported in this note demonstrate the ingenuity of the study species, reflecting its success in anthropogenic habitats such as urban and suburban areas (Shanahan et al. 2011). The observations also expand our limited knowledge of avian use of human hair.

A broad range of avian taxa are known to incorporate mammalian hair and fur into their nest materials (Tóth 2008). Various authors have raised potential benefits of using these materials, including possible advantages for nestling survival and recruitment provided by insulative properties of hair of nests (Hilton et al. 2004, Deeming et al. 2020). Others have speculated whether the presence of mammalian hair and fur in nests may deter potential predators (Coppedge 2010, Pollock et al. 2021), as observed in sloughed skins from snakes (Medlin & Risch 2006), or deter parasites (Pollock et al. 2021), as observed in certain floral materials (Scott-Baumann & Morgan 2015). While documented cases of birds exploiting mammalian hair and fur have mainly involved wildlife (e.g. Martin et al. 2003, Symes & Hirons 2014) and domesticated livestock (e.g. Favaloro 1942, Harris 1946), there have also been at least two documented instances of birds including human hair in their nests (Packard 1949, Pascoe & Saxon 1992).

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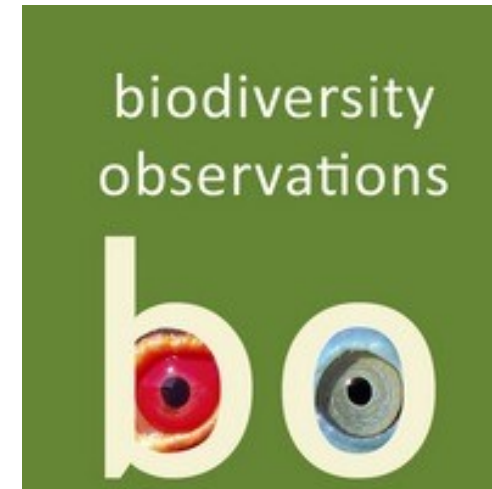
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