

Pied Currawongs' larder

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A pair of Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* hunt in my backyard at Shortland, watching my gardening efforts and then, when I have left, proceeding to inspect the diggings for disturbed prey. They are unafraid of me and come quite close. This allowed me to observe their dining habits in October 2010 when they were feeding three chicks at a nest in a tall tree.

On 18th I noticed that one of the pair had a medium-sized rat wedged in the fork of a small shrub about 15cm from the ground. It tore at the fresh, red flesh swallowing small pieces. The tearing caused the rat to fall out of the fork whereupon the currawong repeatedly tried to put it back into the fork. Once successful, it continued its munchings.

On 20th I noticed the currawong again at the fork, and this time a fledged honeyeater was wedged in the fork. It was either a Brown or Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichmera indistincta* or *Lichenostomus chrysops*, but the carcass was too damaged to identify. Again the currawong tore off strips of flesh and ate them at the fork. It did not eat the carcass clean, but kept returning to chew off more pieces. Several adult Noisy Miners *Manorina*

melanocephala were hassling the currawong, but it took no notice at all.

On 27th and 28th immature, but fledged, Spotted Doves *Streptopelia chinensis* became breakfast. On 27th one body was secured in the fork of the broken limb of a eucalypt about 3m from the ground. On 28th the body of a different Spotted Dove was wedged in the original fork 15cm from the ground. Higgins *et al.* (2007: 537) describe this behaviour as follows: 'Prey too large to be swallowed whole usually wedged into fork, crevice, gnarl or splinter in live or dead tree or shrub, then dismembered with bill'.

Not all prey was treated in this fashion. On 28th at 1pm the currawong caught the large skink which inhabited my open garage under the house. It flew off with the skink in its bill.

REFERENCE

Higgins, P.J., Peter, J.M. and Cowling, S.J. (Eds) (2007). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 7 Part A'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)