

The Common Koel: A Bird Rarely seen in Our Area – Have you seen it?

... Mike and Kaye Traynor; drawings by Kaye Traynor

Scientific Name: *Eudynamys scolopacea*; 40-46 cms.

Other common names: Cooee-bird, Rain Bird, Black Cuckoo, Flinders' Cuckoo

Male: Dark, glossy, blue-black with blue-green tinge; *flight feathers* and *undertail* are dull black; *eye* is dark red to vermilion; *bill* is whitish, buff-grey; *tail* is long and rounded.

Female: *Crown, nape* and *face* are black; *upperparts* are cocoa brown, with plentiful, white spots, and bars; buff-white, whisker mark above black, throat stripe; *underparts* are white to chestnut-buff, and lightly barred darker.

The Common Koel, which is a cuckoo, winters in New Guinea and eastern Indonesia, and travels to Australia during the summer months, to breed. The birds arrive in August or September, and spread down the coastal areas of northern Australia, along the east coast, decreasing in New South Wales, and very rarely extending its range to Victoria.

The birds can be found in monsoon forests, rainforests and thickly vegetated, river courses. They are often hard to observe, as they stay high in the leafy foliage. The females are silent and retiring, the males are less secretive and easier to see. Their distinctive, frequent, shrill *Coo-ee* calls can be heard mainly in the mornings and evenings and often at night.

In the breeding season the cuckoo can often be heard calling – the male uttering loud, shrill whistles, and the characteristic *ko-el* call, while the female responds with short, piercing whistles.

Like most cuckoos, they lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, including Friarbirds, Orioles and Magpie Larks. Female Koels lay only one egg in each nest. The egg is smooth, pink or buff with a slight sheen, sprinkled with spots, dots and short wavy streaks of dull purple-red, with underlying markings of purple-grey; its size is about 34 x 24 mm. Koel chicks have a short incubation period of 13 or 14 days – and they are able to monopolise

the food brought by the foster parents. The chick takes all the food, and either starves out or ejects the other nestlings. Although adult koels are mainly fruit eaters, the nestlings are forced to take whatever is offered by the foster parents, such as insects and caterpillars.

The adults forage for food in the forest canopy and often visit gardens to feed on cultivated fruits.



References:

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