

COMMENTARY

Long Laying Intervals

S. MARCHANT¹

Astheimer's (1985) paper prompts a comment on the general occurrence of laying at intervals of more than 24 h among oscine Passeriformes. He listed only three such species with intervals of 2 days between eggs and in his introductory remarks said that "laying intervals longer than one day . . . are conspicuously rare" in such birds. Examples of this phenomenon in Australia have been overlooked.

The following species of Australian oscines have been recorded repeatedly (pers. obs., unless otherwise identified) to lay at intervals of 48 h, and records can be substantiated in the Royal Australian Ornithologists' Union Nest Record Scheme: *Pycnoptilus floccosus* (Zwart 1973), *Gerygone mouki*, *G. fusca*, *G. olivacea*, *Acanthiza pusilla*, *A. reguloides*, *A. chrysorrhoa*, and *A. lineata*. This makes it fairly certain that all species of *Gerygone* (12) and *Acanthiza* (13) lay at this interval. Possibly, all members of the Acanthizidae (ca. 45 species) do so, but the only other species of that family for which there is some evidence is *Smicromnis brevirostris* (Courtney and Marchant 1971). A laying interval of 48 h has been noted in *Climacteris leucophaea* twice (Marchant 1980), in *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* once (pers. obs.), and suspected in *Stipiturus malachurus* (RAOU Nest Record Scheme). Thus, the Climacteridae and Ptilonorhynchidae as a whole are under suspicion of having long laying periods, but more data are needed.

Because most oscines lay or are assumed to lay at precise intervals of 24 h, it should be mentioned that *Eopsaltria australis* lays at an interval of about 27 h so that, although the first egg is laid about dawn, the last egg in a clutch of three is laid toward noon or later (Marchant 1984). Also, *Monarcha melanopsis* has twice been noted (pers. obs.) to lay its second egg 48 h after the first and its third 24 h after the second.

The occurrence of long laying intervals in oscines is evidently less unusual than Astheimer supposed. Further, it may be pointed out that, except for two corvids, all known examples come from the Australasian region. Unfortunately, this aspect of breeding in Australian oscines has attracted little attention.

LITERATURE CITED

- ASTHEIMER, L. B. 1985. Long laying intervals: a possible mechanism and its implications. *Auk* 102: 401-409.
- COURTNEY, J., & S. MARCHANT. 1971. Breeding details of some common birds in south-eastern Australia. *Emu* 71: 121-133.
- MARCHANT, S. 1980. Incubation and nesting periods of some Australian birds. *Corella* 4: 30-32.
- . 1984. Nest records of the Eastern Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria australis*. *Emu* 84: 167-174.
- ZWART, M. H. 1973. Breeding and behaviour of Pilotbirds. *Emu* 73: 124-128.

¹ Box 123, Moruya, NSW 2537, Australia.

Received 11 September 1985, accepted 3 October 1985.