

BIRD CARE & CONSERVATION SOCIETY
CARING FOR WILD BIRDS IN CAPTIVITY SERIES
(ADELAIDE AND ENVIRONS)

THE
BLACK-FACED CUCKOO-SHRIKE

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Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

1. Introduction:

The Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, which is neither a true Cuckoo or true Shrike, is found Australia wide but is rarely seen in large numbers. Individual pairs are often seen perching on telephone wires in the breeding season.

It has an undulating flight, flicking or shuffling the wings when settling after flight, giving rise to the common name of "shuffle-wing".

It is a hopping bird and does not spend time on the ground searching for food as does the Magpie or Crested Pigeon. Food is spotted from the perch above, collected from the ground then taken back to the perch to be eaten. Most food appears to be gathered from trees or bushes.

2. Description:

Nestling (Pulli) Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes have a mottled appearance, which blends into the tree bark of the nesting site, suggesting camouflage from predators. They have a very wide gape and are sometimes mistaken for a Tawny Frogmouth.

When approaching weaning, these feathers are moulted and the bird takes on the appearance of the adult with the exception of the black head and throat.

Juveniles have a broad black stripe running from the beak through the eye and ending behind the ear. Towards the end of the first year, around nine months of age, after a heavy moult the adult plumage starts to develop. This is a slow process, taking up to four months before the bird assumes the total adult plumage.

3. Maintenance of adults and self-feeding juveniles:

These are difficult to maintain in captivity, rarely feeding themselves and requiring force feeding at regular intervals.

Live food gives the best results but vegetable matter must be included in the diet.

They are unlikely to respond well to rescue unless captivity is of short duration.

4. Nestlings (Pulli):

These are labour intensive, requiring frequent feeds during the daylight hours. Food is rapidly digested and passes rapidly through the system therefore the bird will require feeding at least every two hours. Failure to feed regularly will lead to the death of the bird do not undertake to the raising of nestlings unless you are able to commit yourself to the time required every day.

Initially success with nestlings was poor. Birds were given a wholly insectivorous diet that proved unsuitable. Following consultation with the SA Museum who had examined the stomach contents of birds from the wild (to find out what they were eating), the diet was altered to include fruit and vegetables in equal proportion to the insectivore food together with vitamins and calcium.

Since changing the diet no nestlings have died in the last three seasons (years).

5. Diet in captivity:

These birds are opportunistic feeders and could be classed as omnivores. Food must be given fresh each day, and should include a selection from the following categories:

a) Live:

mealworms, cockroaches, crickets, moths etc.

b) Insectivore substitute:

preservative free mince, together with infant strength Pentavite and Calcium sandoz, (thickened with Wombaroo insectivore mix to a putty consistency), cooked chicken, mouse portions, hard-boiled egg, cheese.

c) Fruit:

grapes, pears, bananas, citrus, tomato, apple, pomegranate.

d) Vegetable:

celery, lettuce, green peas, beans, cucumber, zucchini, sweetcorn.

e) Other supplements (available in the wild):

dandelion flowers and leaves, lilly pilly berries, cotoneaster berries, native blossoms.

Some birds take wholemeal bread and seed, particularly safflower. Experiment with various fruits and vegetables and give as much variety as possible.

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6. Release:

a) Hand reared nestlings (pulli):

Because nestlings are slow to wean imprinting is very common and the successful release rate is very low. Best results are achieved where two young are raised together - every effort should be made to obtain a suitable companion when a nestling is received or to pass the bird to another member who is holding other Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes.

When almost weaned birds should be placed in an outside aviary and contact withdrawn as soon as possible to allow them to become wild.

Birds should be released where they have been raised and no more than two releases, a season should be attempted at the same site. These would need to be several weeks apart. Once released birds rarely return seeking food unless unable to cope in the wild.

When preparing for release, birds should be offered food that will be available to them in the wild. Follow the release procedures as for other species, i.e. release should be early in the day after the bird has fed. Do not release if the weather forecast is for heatwave, strong winds or heavy rain. Arrange with a BCCS bander to have the bird banded before release.

b) Recovered adults and free- flying juveniles:

Release of adults and free-flying juveniles should be as near as practicable to the place of rescue. (*Note: *This does not apply to hand-reared nestlings.....See above*). Accurate details of the location **must** be obtained from the rescuer. Birds are aggressive to others of their species so **do not** release into another bird's territory.

7. Status

The Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike is a protected bird, therefore a rescue permit, obtainable from the Fauna Permit Unit, Department of the Environment Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs, is required to keep in captivity when rescued from the wild.

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