

# Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler

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## CAMOUFLAGED BABY-FOOD

The Pacific Baza (l = 40cm) is a spectacular bird with its staring yellow eyes, barred breast and sloping crest. Its common name is "Crested Hawk" and is found in backyards in the western suburbs. It is the only bird of prey that forages in suburban trees as well as in the bush. The Pacific Baza is a carnivore and can be observed preying on frogs, large insects and small reptiles.

The Pacific Baza builds a flimsy nest high in the forest canopy. When the young are hatched and fledged, they are ideally positioned to be fed a plentiful diet because the forest canopy is a veritable treasure-trove of baby-food! This was never apparent to me until I witnessed the young being fed. I then realised how many very large stick-insects are feeding silently and unseen in the canopy. Of course, birds of prey are known to have better eyesight than we have, they have a more sensitive retina,

and see a broader spectrum of wavelengths. When the Baza looks at me, as he calmly does, he sees me in greater detail than I see him.

I have observed the Baza feeding their young on long stick-insects. But not the complete insect! The adult first plunges into the high foliage and grasps the stick-insect in its talons, then it moves to a perch on a horizontal branch. All the time the young are loudly begging nearby. In the most unhurried manner, the adult carefully strips the legs from the insect. Only then does the adult accede to the pleading of the young and offer them the most nutritious baby-food: the dissected insect.

Happy Birding!

– Jim

Image: Pacific Baza by Mike Ford ©

