

# Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler

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## BIRD SOUNDS

These beautiful mornings everyone must be waking up with the wonderful sounds of the birds. This morning I heard for the first time the migrant Koels from New Guinea joining in the local dawn chorus. With the arrival of Spring the outdoor aviary we live in has certainly got a lot noisier.

Bird sounds, classified into songs and calls, are the language birds use to communicate. Songs are musical sounds usually made only by males; calls are simple short sounds used by both males and females. Most bird species use calls, very few are mute. However, only half the world's bird species use songs. The origin of the birds that sing has recently been shown to have occurred in Australia 45 million years ago and radiated out to the rest of the planet.

Bird song is used for two purposes, for courtship and for territorial defence. Both of these purposes are central to the activities of most birds right now when the reproductive cycle is in full swing: identifying

species, finding mates, selecting territories, building nests and mounting defences against invaders.

Bird calls are used for many purposes, some of which are always important: contact calls, alarm calls, hawk calls, feeding calls, flock calls, mobbing calls; whereas other calls are important only when breeding: begging calls, distress calls, nest calls. At this time of year the Noisy Miner chicks can be heard with their begging calls almost all of the day. I have taught my grandchildren to listen out for mobbing calls at the back of our home. Each time we hear the mobbing calls we hurry out and see what predator the local birds have found. By this method, we have found Boobook Owls, Carpet Python snakes, Tree snakes, Falcons and cats. We can learn the language of the birds and enjoy 'life' more.

Happy, informative listening,

~ Jim

Image: Russet-tailed Thrush at Brookfield  
by Ed Frazer ©