

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler



WHY US?

My family prompted me to write about the bird that is annoying them from dawn to dusk with its incessant calling! There are two birds whose ceaseless calling have annually disturbed our street. Thoughts of murder and revenge have been voiced to me. The two birds are the Wonga Pigeon (calling now) and the Channel-billed Cuckoo (December). I heard the latter this morning, it has just arrived from Papua New Guinea, and when they lay their egg in the Magpies' nest in our street and the cuckoo fledgling is begging from the magpie carers, the racket will start again, and the question 'Why us?' will again be voiced.

Back to the currently offending Wonga Pigeon!

It is a male advertising itself to the local females. After weeks of unsuccessful calling, he is continuing to advertise. The call is a loud single short note repeated 200 or more times without a pause. These loud notes, given from high in a tree can be heard clearly at 2km. Evolution has

uniquely equipped this bird to find the perfect mate no matter how far away she is! Wonderfully, the male's calls and courting display are like no other pigeon.

What to do about the incessant racket! Historically, the early settlers enjoyed the Wonga Pigeon for their excellent eating qualities. However, for us, the rational path is to celebrate that we are listening to an ancient species doing what it has proven, over millions of years, to lead to successful reproduction.

Then, having admired his energy and fortitude, to wish him all the best and hope that he is soon paired!

The emotive path is to harbour dark thoughts and ask everyone who will listen, 'why here, why us?' The practical response

is to use ear-plugs. (We have tried noise-cancelling headphones, but they cannot help because the call is not noise – physics again!)

Happy rational listening!

~ Jim

Contact Jim: beautifulbirds@y7mail.com

Image: Wonga Pigeon taken at Brookfield by Ed Frazer

