

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,

Jim Butler

What's in a Name?

MY parental home was a couple of hundred metres from the shores of Botany Bay and I started birding there before I was ten.

One of the first birds I identified was the Blue Jay. I now know that I could have grown up almost anywhere in Australia and had the same early experience with this beautiful bird. It is found everywhere and therefore has many names.

The Yindjibarndi people of the Pilbara had the name "julgira" and kept them as pets by clipping their wings. The name I first learnt "Blue Jay" is misleading because there are no Jays in Australia! Today, the official name is "Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike" (33 cm), but that is also misleading because it is neither a Cuckoo nor a Shrike! These misnomers were applied because it has a hooked shrike-like bill and the shape and colouring of a cuckoo. A very useful and not misleading common name is "Shufflewing" which is derived by direct observations of their curious habit of noticeably shuffling each wing immediately after alighting on a branch. This behaviour is so obvious, so unique that it leads directly to the identification of this species whether it is close by or far away. Both the male and female flick their wings, usually as a comfort movement, immediately after landing but also during courtship interactions.

The omnivorous Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike feeds on insects and other invertebrates captured in the air, taken from foliage or caught on the ground. In addition, some fruits and seeds are also eaten. They build a small nest of sticks bound with spiders' web threads, on a thick horizontal fork, usually in a eucalypt at 10 - 12 metres from the ground. The nest is quite inconspicuous from below. When the nestlings approach fledging, there is barely enough room for them and they live precariously. Occasionally, one does fall out to the ground.

Look out for this misnamed common bird!

~ Jim

Contact Jim: beautifulbirds@y7mail.com Image: Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Digital Bird Guide: <http://www.moggillcreek.org/> Carson Dron at Anstead

