

## ANTICS OF SATIN BOWERBIRDS AT THE BOWER

**Photography and text by Valdamay Jones**

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The Bowerbird Study was commenced early in the year of 2009 in my garden at Blackbutt, South Burnett, Queensland. The Satin Bowerbirds (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) have been in full mating mode and cavorting about since last spring.

A tent was erected for a hide on a garden bed and behind bushes. Shade was required as it was a hot summer, the position of the tent was therefore quite important. The tent was approximately 20 feet from the Bower with a clear view. The birds paid no attention to the tent noises or movements.

A Canon 10D with a 500mm lens attached mounted on a tripod had no effect upon the birds activities as the images show.

The birds were observed for many hours at a time during January, February and March 2009. Hundreds of photographs were taken over the 65 days of observations. Here are just a few.



1. The Bower site was chosen - under and in between the bushy Darwinea and the Marmalade Grevillea.



2. The platform was placed in position – the uprights were then firmly embedded into the platform.



3. The first sticks were erected. This guy was GREEN and really KEEN - blue pegs already!



4. Many more sticks had been added - lots of activity.



5. A Wonga Pigeon decided to inspect the work. The antics of all the birds were quite amusing!



8. Well you couldn't miss this guy – B2. Or mix him up with the others. He was going to be very black, very soon.



6. Apostle Birds came - they were very excited, all peering below, to see what was going on.



9. B3, the Instructor, was a very smart and handsome fellow. He periodically came to inspect the work in progress.



7. Introducing the bower builder - B1. This bird remained green for the season. He was very enthusiastic and flamboyant.



10. B4, the OAP with a bald spot, was definitely past it.



11. I am of the opinion B3 came to the Bower to instruct the younger males in etiquette and behaviour at the Bower. Young males repeatedly took the position of the female and sat in the bower whilst B3 did the ritual dance around it, as shown in this shot.



12. B2 watched a demonstration of 'wing flicking' and general dancing about by B3.



13. Enter B4! He had a bald spot on his head – couldn't miss it. B1 was not impressed with the entry of this bird. He did his utmost to chase him off, but B4 was in the act for the duration.

So we had four male birds, easily identified, to observe.



14. "B2, are you paying attention? This is what you do!" B2 watched as B3 continued with instruction.



15. B1 continued his efforts to rid the area of B4. This proved to be impossible.



16. B1 displayed with finesse - whilst poor old B4 just sat it out.



17. B1 tried all modes of display - nothing worked. Keep an eye on that pink flower



18. B3 had been inspecting the Bower – he was about to exit the site He spied the pink flower as he walked past - looked over his shoulder and turned back, then peered at it.



19. He very deliberately picked it off!! He then proceeded to march off with it and 'dump' it well away - wrong COLOR!



20. B3 and I arrived at the site to discover a disaster - a Pied Currawong had been seen completely destroying the bower!



21. Rebuilding was soon under way by B3. When he left the scene, B1 would appear and continue the building as though nothing had happened.



22. It took 3 hours to re-erect the bower.



23. A visit by a female. Females came and went quite quickly. The males danced about, the females appeared to be unimpressed.



26. Here's the "glide" again - closer to the bower this time. The wings were held quite low, and it looked very strange. The bird then stood up tall, had a shake, and carried on.



24. The "Glide". This display position was very amusing. B1 assumed "hunched" state with head down, tail feathers fanned, body feathers puffed up. He quickly moved forward with tiny running steps, appearing to "glide".



27. I watched closely - this lady was very aggressive. Note the 'hackles'. YES - she was feeding young!



25. "Gliding" mostly took place on the lawn - it was not so easy on the platform of sticks!



28. So I followed her. This feeding took place high in a fir tree. I did not find the nest.



29. Next day she brought two young birds. Perhaps this was a different female and the young were cousins - I really don't know.



30. B2 was almost there - the afternoon light made the blue feathers appear almost purple.



31. Isn't he gorgeous with his feathers all settled and smooth?

### Postscript

A week before Christmas, 2009, B1, who was still green, was busy building a bower in the same spot again. There has been much calling, buzzing and wheezing of late. Life goes on.