

## Cooperative feeding among juvenile Australasian Figbirds

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Each summer between November and March young Australasian Figbirds *Sphecothebes vieilloti* come into the care of the Native Animal Trust Fund (NATF). Most of these are newly fledged chicks that have made an unsuccessful first flight and been found on the ground. If able to perch, ideally, these chicks should be placed on a tree branch where the parent birds can resume care and feeding. However, this is not well known, so that the chicks arrive in care as a result of well-intentioned human intervention.

While in care the juvenile figbirds are fed on a mixture of fruit, mince plus insectivore powder, calcium and High Protein Mix, mealworms and crickets. They remain in care until fully grown, are banded and released as a group. Time in care

varies from just weeks to two months depending on size when admitted into care. It is the policy of NATF where possible to keep animals and birds of the same species together, particularly in the case of naturally flocking birds.

In such situations, it has been observed that young figbirds in care practise cooperative feeding, with the slightly older and larger birds feeding the younger ones. This is in the absence of any adult bird. While the first birds into care may need to be hand fed, as the group increases in size all feeding is done by the larger juveniles. The likelihood of birds becoming imprinted onto humans is greatly reduced as the need for human contact is eliminated.