

Small crabs: a new prey record for Grey Butcherbird

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On 15 October 2022, I observed an adult Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* capture a small crab in the Mambo Wetlands Reserve (32° 43' 47"S, 152° 05' 40"E) at Salamander Bay. The mangroves are part of an Estuarine Saltmarsh Complex in the tidal zone at the northern end of the reserve and are located between coastal forest to the south and the shores of Salamander Bay to the north.

The butcherbird was first heard giving a short, soft intermittent call and was then subsequently observed perched in a Grey Mangrove *Avicennia marina* at a height of about 0.4 m above the ground. Several small crabs were moving around the muddy substrate below. The bird successfully captured a crab by sally-pouncing, then returned briefly to the perch. It then flew off with its prey towards a nearby stand of Black She-oak *Allocasuarina littoralis*. The tide was rising at the time and there was 1-2 cm of water over some of the area.

When the muddy substrate across the Estuarine Saltmarsh Complex is exposed, numerous small crabs are present, foraging around the base of the mangroves and amongst the adjacent Samphire *Sarcocornia quinqueflora*. The crabs are dark reddish-brown, 20-30 mm across the carapace with pink-orange claws and large dark-brown eyes on stalks. They tend to retreat rapidly into burrows when disturbed.

This record may represent a previously unreported foraging behaviour for Grey Butcherbird. There are no references in HANZAB (Higgins *et al.* 2006) describing the species foraging for crabs or foraging amongst mangroves, although they have been recorded as being present in mangroves in South Australia (Matheson 1976).

Although the observed foraging behaviour may have been opportunistic, it is possible that this was a regular occurrence at this location. I had heard the bird calling intermittently amongst the mangroves for a period of time before I located it, suggesting it was accustomed to foraging in this habitat. I have observed small crabs in this area at low tide on numerous occasions.

A pair of Grey Butcherbird has previously been observed nesting in the nearby Black She-oak that surround the saltmarsh. It is possible that the adult bird I observed was providing the crabs to chicks or fledglings in the she-oak.

REFERENCES

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