

## Observation of Grey-crowned Babblers communally roosting, in the evenings

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Grey-crowned Babblers *Pomatostomus temporalis* are engaging social birds whose preferred habitat is open dry sclerophyll woodland. I live on a bushland block at East Seaham, New South Wales, and fairly frequently observe these birds in my area. The birds move around in small groups, chattering much of the time as they seek out insects and spiders with their thin sharp beaks. They frequently cooperate to build elaborate, bag-like dormitory nests (mainly of woven twigs and dead grass stems) for night roosting.

In April 1997, a group of Grey-crowned Babblers was observed building and then abandoning a communal nest in a mandarin tree only 10 metres from our back verandah. However, in mid-October of the same year, a group of nine (9) babblers returned and quickly refurbished the nest. On 14 October, I observed all the babblers go into the nest at 5.57 pm (EST). I then watched their roosting over the next 33 days, noting the time on each occasion that all the birds had settled into the nest. The individual birds arrived at the nest over a 5-10 minute period, each quickly entering, with one bird apparently keeping a lookout as the others arrived and entered. Much loud chattering occurred in this process. The sentinel bird then entered the nest, and all was immediately quiet.

As the daylight lengthened (with the approach of the summer solstice on 22 December), the birds generally arrived and entered the nest a little later each day, though this period varied somewhat, probably according to the weather conditions (mainly length of daylight), but possibly due to other factors, as noted by Gill and Dow (1985).

During these observations, I did not interfere with the nest. However, on 5 November, I had attached

a microcassette recorder to a branch near the nest prior to the arrival of the birds and switched it on. After the birds entered the nest and settled, I quietly approached and tried carefully to switch off the recorder, but the birds exploded out of the nest and took over ten minutes to return.

At the time of my observations I was unaware of the paper by Gill and Dow (1985) who had documented detailed waking and roosting times of Grey-crowned Babblers in south-east Queensland during spring. However, the results of my observations over a 33-day period reflect their major finding that the times of roosting depend on changes in light intensity, notably the increasing length of daylight occurring during spring and early summer. There were, of course, fluctuations within this general trend, and these may relate to other factors such as relative humidity, individual foraging success, the existence of a separate breeding nest, and harassment by other birds (see **Table 1**).

Overall, it would seem that the babblers roost on average about 14 minutes prior to the sunset time each day. Certainly my observations support the additional findings by Gill and Dow (1985) that the birds call loudly at roosting time, but are immediately silent on entry of the last "sentinel" bird.

### REFERENCE

- Gill, B.J. and Dow, D.D. (1985). Waking and Roosting of Grey-crowned Babblers, *Pomatostomus temporalis* in south-east Queensland during spring. *Emu* **85**: 97-105.

**Table 1.** Babbler Roosting Times: 14 October – 15 November 1997 at Balickera (East Seaham) (Eastern Standard Time).

Date	Time into nest	Sunset time	Notes
14.10.97	5.57 pm	6.04 pm	Fine, sunny
15.10.97	6.00 pm	6.05 pm	Fine, sunny
16.10.97	6.00 pm	6.06 pm	Fine, hot, windy (2 in at 5.53 pm; others at 6.00 pm)
17.10.97	5.50 pm	6.07 pm	Fine, hot, windy
18.10.97	5.50 pm	6.08 pm	Fine, sunny, cool
19.10.97	5.52 – 5.58 pm	6.08 pm	Fine, cloudy, very cool. Only 8 seen (2+2+1+3)
20.10.97	6.00 pm	6.09 pm	Cold, cloudy, windy; harassed by magpies
21.10.97	6.00 pm	6.10 pm	Cool, windy, cloudy
22.10.97	5.50 pm	6.11 pm	Slight rain shower; cool, cloudy
23.10.97	6.15 pm	6.12 pm	Sunny, hot
24.10.97	6.08 pm	6.12 pm	Sunny, hot
25.10.97	6.07 pm	6.13 pm	Sunny, hot
26.10.97	6.10 pm	6.14 pm	Sunny, hot
27.10.97	5.45 pm	6.15 pm	Very hot, oppressive; thunder heard
28.10.97	5.59 pm	6.16 pm	Cloudy, very warm; extremely dry
29.10.97	No sighting	6.17 pm	Cloudy; late shower
30.10.97	5.54 pm	6.18 pm	Fine, hot
31.10.97	6.05 pm	6.18 pm	Fine, hot, sunny
1.11.97	5.58 pm	6.18 pm	Fine, hot, dry
2.11.97	6.03 pm	6.20 pm	Cloudy, humid, then sunny
3.11.97	6.04 – 6.08 pm	6.21 pm	Cloudy all day; mild
4.11.97	6.10 – 6.12 pm	6.22 pm	Showers, cloudy, mild
5.11.97	6.16 pm	6.23 pm	Fine, sunny
6.11.97	6.19 pm	6.24 pm	Fine, sunny, pleasant
7.11.97	6.13 pm	6.25 pm	Fine, hot, extremely dry; birds around all day; some water baths observed
8.11.97	6.04 pm	6.26 pm	Cloudy all day; cool
9.11.97	5.52 pm	6.26 pm	Cloudy all day; cool
10.11.97	6.10 pm	6.27 pm	Hot, oppressive; birds waited for 10 minutes on nearby tree, and harassed by magpie
11.11.97	6.25 pm	6.28 pm	Hot, windy, humid
12.11.97	6.29 pm	6.29 pm	Very warm, cloudy; mild evening
13.11.97	6.25 pm	6.30 pm	Hot, fine, oppressive
14.11.97	6.05 pm	6.31 pm	Cloudy, humid
15.11.97	6.26 pm	6.32 pm	Light rain overnight; very warm
16.11.97	No birds seen	6.33 pm	Sunny; very warm
17.11.97	No birds entered nest	6.34 pm	Fine, sunny; babblers were seen refurbishing the nest during the day
18.11.97	No birds seen	6.35 pm	Slight shower; babblers were not seen again until 25 November, but they did not go near the nest; thereafter, not seen at all, though sometimes heard