

Unusual behaviour between Grey-tailed Tattlers

Lois Wooding

14/4 Muller Street, Salamander Bay, NSW 2317, Australia

A repetitive behaviour between two Grey-tailed Tattlers *Heteroscelus brevipes* was witnessed at Hawks Nest, 29 March 2012. When first observed the birds, both displaying well advanced breeding plumage, were feeding along the water's edge approximately 15m from the observation point. The bird on the left stopped feeding and appeared to make visual contact with the bird on the right which also stopped feeding. Both birds remained motionless then, in perfect synchrony, turned their heads first to the left and paused, then to the right and paused before elongating their necks and returning to their original position.

The routine, which had the appearance of being choreographed, took approximately one minute to complete and was repeated several times at 2-3 minute intervals over a 25-30 minute period. It was discontinued when the tide rose and the birds flew off.

The action was always instigated by the bird on the left and the distance between the birds remained constant. Although the behaviour was suggestive of courtship the pre-migratory date and southern hemisphere location would seem to contradict that assumption. A search of the literature (Higgins & Davies 1996) has so far failed to reveal any mention of this behaviour.



Grey-tailed Tattlers at Hawks Nest
(Photo Bob Rech)

REFERENCE

Higgins, P.J. and Davies, S.J.J.F. (Eds) (1996). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds Volume 3: Snipe to Pigeons'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)

