

Adoption of Laughing Kookaburra chicks

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After a storm in November 2015 two Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae* chicks were brought into Gloucester, NSW for care. The smaller chick was found on 22 November at Spring Creek, Bucketts Way, about 20km south of Gloucester, and the second larger chick was found on 26 November near Barrington River bridge, north of Barrington village, 7km west of Gloucester, thus one can assume they were not related. Both chicks were given to carer Megan Lewis. They settled in immediately and fed on meat and insectivore mixture. The larger chick was noticeably quieter than the smaller one.

The chicks were placed in an open-fronted cardboard box, the front of which was shut with a wire grid. A few days later, adult kookaburras were heard calling at dawn and a pair observed near the box with prey in their beaks. Subsequently the box was kept open in the daytime and the adults were seen feeding lizards (up to about 25cm long), frogs and insects to the chicks. However, Megan continued to provide extra food in case one was not receiving sufficient.

On 10 January 2016, the larger chick left the box and was seen in trees near the house perched with two adult kookaburras. The following day all three were gone. On 15 January the remaining chick left the box and perched on the nearby Hills Hoist and then higher in a mulberry tree. It refused to come down to be fed and any food left out was eaten by Noisy Miners *Manorina melanocephala*. No calls or sightings of adults were heard and the chick did

not return to the box. The following day it had flown.

A group of five kookaburras briefly visited the site on 20 January but it was not possible to say if any were the "adopted chicks" or if the smaller chick had been adopted. Since then kookaburra groups of varying sizes have been heard in the area or perched nearby.

Breeding kookaburras are known to 'adopt' unrelated fledglings (Higgins 1999) and this behaviour is often exploited when trying to rehabilitate abandoned or lost fledglings.

Kaplan (2015) in discussing the prevalence of cooperative behaviour in Australian birds mentions that two native bird species, Laughing Kookaburras and White-winged Choughs *Corcorax melanorhamphos*, are known to take in foreign or orphaned juveniles; both species are cooperative breeders.

REFERENCES

- Higgins, P.J. (Ed.) (1999). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbirds'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)
- Kaplan, G. (2015). 'Bird Minds: cognition and behaviour in Australian native birds'. (CSIRO Publishing: Clayton, Victoria.)