

AN INCIDENCE OF DUETTING BETWEEN AN ABBOTTS BABBLER AND A MAGPIE ROBIN

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On February 10 1985 in the Padang-Sugihan Wildlife Reserve, South Sumatra, a female Abbott's Babbler *Trichastoma abbotti* repeatedly uttered its usual notes in duet with an imitation of the male's song, sung by a male Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis*.

Several babbler species including Abbott's are well known as 'duet' singers, whereby the male's song is accompanied by one or several notes on the same pitch given by the female. Stuebing (1983) suggested that such duelling behaviour was to cement (Smythies, 1981), and also sings several regular phrases. Although the male Magpie Robin will often sing throughout the day, its song is usually heard in the early morning hours, as with the Abbott's Babbler.

.On that morning, a pair of Abbott's Babblers was heard duetting almost continuous-ly. A nearby Magpie Robin was heard to imitate the song of the male, whereby both babblers fell silent. The Magpie Robin uttered another imitation of the babbler song, which produced a duetting response from the female babbler. This was repeated once, after which the male babbler resumed its song, again accompanied by the female, and the Magpie Robin ceased its imitations.

The incidence of duetting between different species would seem to be very unlikely, as in the case of the Abbott's Babbler duetting occurs only between mated pairs. For example, other pairs nearby have not interfered with the observed pair's song patterns. A possible explanation of this event is that the Magpie Robin's mimicking call was given in an appropriate time sequence with a similar note pattern, eliciting the response from the female babbler that had already been duetting for several hours.

References

Smythies, B.E., 1981. *The Birds of Borneo*, third ed. The Sabah Society and the Malayan Nature Society, Kuala Lumpur.

Stuebing, R., 1983. The Tuneful Babblers. *Malayan Naturalist* 36(3): 10-14.