



Image from Wikipedia, male Superb Lyrebird photographed in Victoria.

SOME LYREBIRD FACTS

The vocal repertoire of the Superb Lyrebird includes mimicry (mostly of other birds such as kookaburra, currawong and rosella), territorial song (10-15 second songs of the lyrebird's own invention), plus various whirring, clicking and *bilick* display calls that are sometimes mistaken for mimicry of man-made sounds such as axe blows or machinery. Loud alarm calls are also given. Lyrebirds call best in the winter months when they are breeding and males may sing for up to 50% of daylight hours, sometimes in bouts lasting half an hour or more. The song is quite loud and can be heard up to 1 km distant. The best time to hear lyrebirds is at dawn and dusk. They are a very wary species and can be extremely difficult to approach.

Superb Lyrebirds may show considerable regional variation in their territorial songs, especially when populations occur in acoustically or geographically isolated locations e.g. in very steep gullies or where suitable habitat is discontinuous. Thus the territorial songs may be unique to any one particular location, and not be heard anywhere else. Territorial songs remain constant to any one location over a period of many years, e.g. the songs from Mt. Airly in NSW have not changed over a 23 year period from 1987 to 2010.

Male lyrebirds learn the songs and mimicry from older males, rather than directly from their surroundings. A suite of mimicry for any one area may include the calls of 6-10 different bird species, and the same suite of species are mimicked by all the lyrebirds at any one location.

Suitable habitat is sclerophyll forest and rainforest, especially where there is plenty of leaf litter. Lyrebirds feed by raking through leaf litter and damp earth, and tearing apart rotten logs to find insects

and worms. The thicker the mulch layer in the forest and the more friable the soil, the better is the quality of habitat.

Males compete for territories, the strongest males hold the best habitat, are the best fed and sing for the longest hours. The purpose of singing is to proclaim territory, keep other males out, and to attract females.

Male lyrebirds establish a territory each winter, the size of the territory depends on the soil quality and is usually 1 hectare or more (the better the habitat the smaller the size of the territory). The male rakes up a display mound, sings, and when a female approaches he may fan out his long tail and dance on the mound. Mating then takes place on the mound. Each male may have a number of display mounds in his territory and may mate with many females. Females establish their own territory which may overlap that of the male.

Females build a stick nest in a tree or on a stump or rock ledge. They lay one egg, and raise the chick alone without help from the male.

Lyrebirds roost in trees and glide down from tree perches to the forest floor to feed. They are weak fliers and they tend to stay in one area and may not travel more than a few kilometres in their lifetime.

In the wild lyrebirds can live to about 20 years. They start breeding at more than 5 years of age.

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