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FLIGHT SONGS OF THE FUSCOUS HONEYEATER

Vicki Powys

On a calm and sunny mid-winter's day in Capertee Valley, NSW, the white box trees are in flower and the resident Fuscous Honeyeaters are already advertising their territories with song flights.

In this box-gum woodland habitat, male honeyeaters launch into a fluttering flight high in the air, singing all the while, then swoop back down into the cover of tree-top foliage.

I became intrigued by the variety of these aerial song types within, say, half a square kilometre, with very many variations on a two-note theme of *we-tu*. It was time to get the recorder out!

A quick check of HANZAB showed that, although the vocalisations of the Fuscous Honeyeater are well-known, the flight song is described simply as a 'deep, metallic, rather twanging *tew-tew-tew*'. My recordings show that there is a lot more to it than this!

The songs occurred intermittently, from any direction, so I made my recordings using binaural clip-on microphones that could listen in all directions at once. In still conditions, even relatively faint songs were picked up satisfactorily on my Olympus LS10 pocket-sized recorder.

After downloading the recordings and extracting the songs, I made sonograms using Raven Lite in conjunction with Izotope RX and Adobe Photoshop. You can see the wide variety of rhythms and note combinations in the flight songs. Several notes would form a pattern when repeated up to a dozen times. Here are some of those combinations, illustrated with sonograms (see Figures 1–10 on pages 5 & 6).

1. *tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu*

2. *we-tu we-tu*

3-5. *we-tu-tu we-tu-tu*

6-7. *we-tu-tu-tu we-tu-tu-tu*

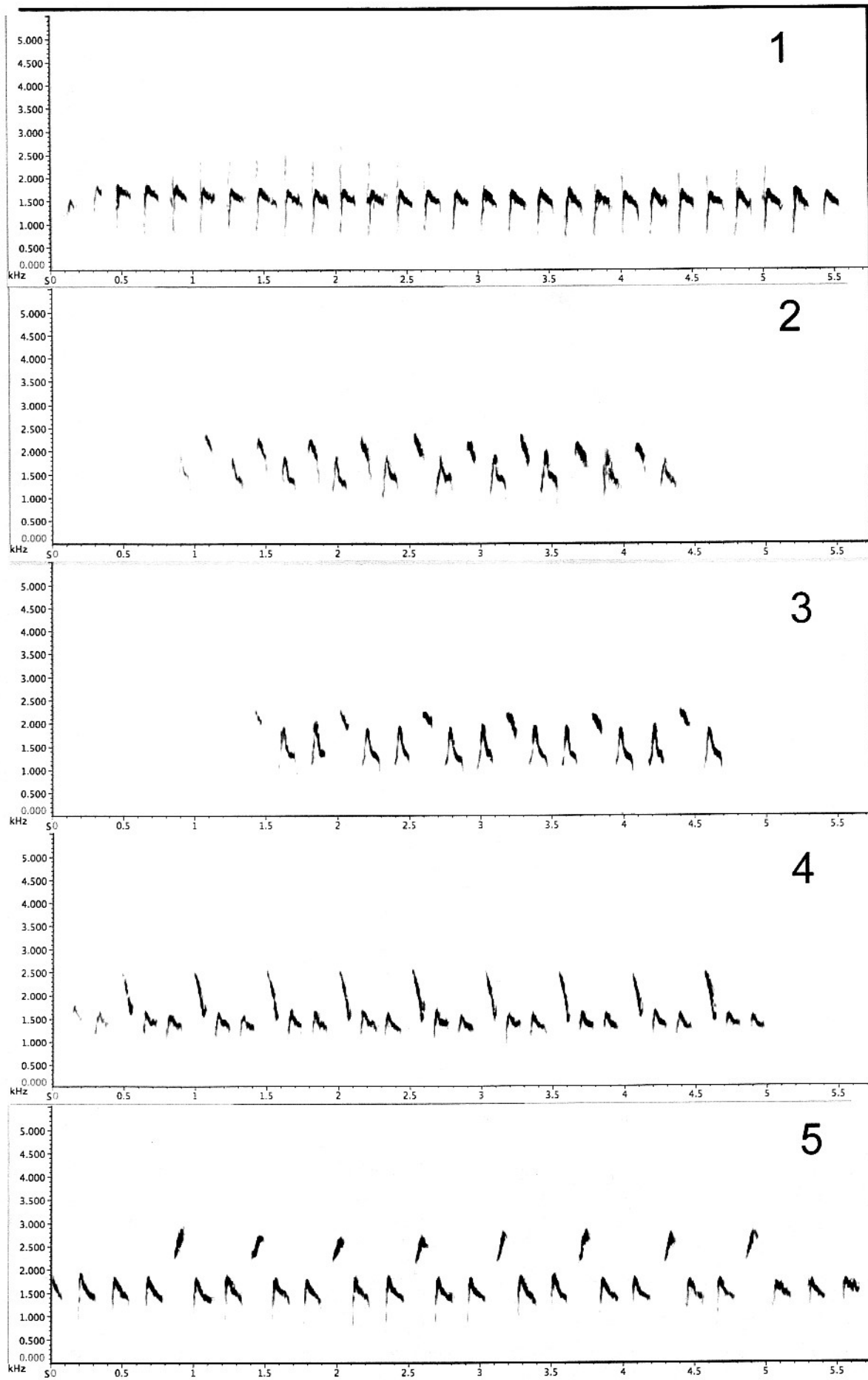
8. *t-we-tu-tu t-we-tu-tu*

9. *trrr-we-tu trrr-we-tu*

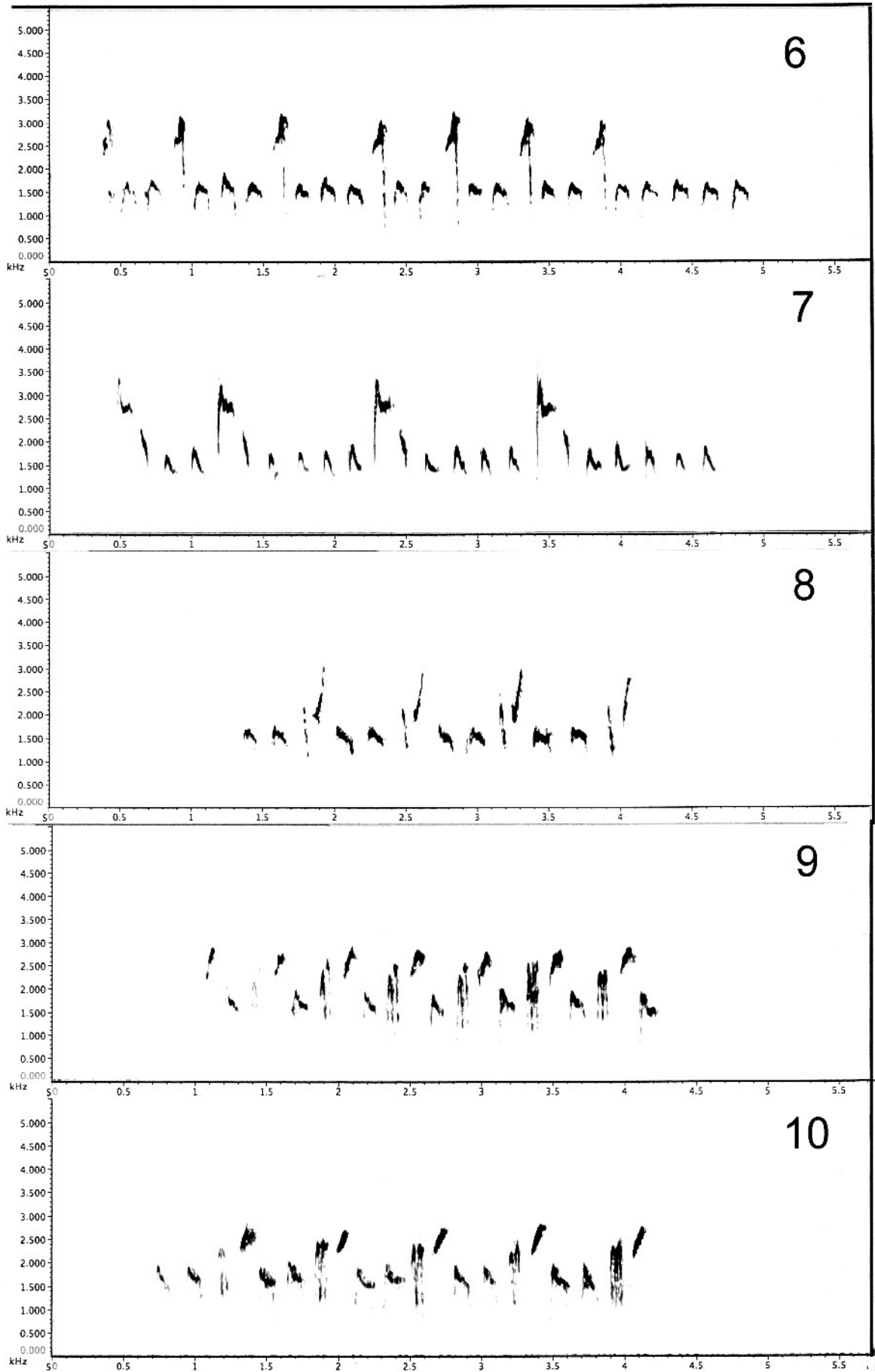
10. *trrr-we-tu-tu trrr-we-tu-tu*

Other calls of the Fuscous Honeyeater include *tickety-boo* type of calls that show regional variation and are also rendered as *a-rigga-law-law-law*, plus some emphatic *drrrrrt* rattling calls, squeaky *jeow* contact calls, a piping alarm call, and some rather special dawn chorus songs. The Fuscous Honeyeater makes up for its drab looks with a wonderful variety of distinctive and interesting songs.

You can hear flight songs, dawn chorus songs, and other calls of the Fuscous Honeyeater on the accompanying **CD # 28**.



Flight songs types 1-5



Flight songs types 6-10