

Curlew Chaos!

by Maree Norris

Customers come in all shapes and sizes but recently I arrived at work to discover a Bush Stone-curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*) waiting patiently.

A large mottled brown bird standing on one very long leg, he was staring intently into the glass window. One passerby commented he'd been like that for hours.

A Parks and Wildlife officer informed me that this bird thinks that other bird (his own reflection) is an intruder into his territory - a *normal behaviour!* I moved him to the nearby park but it resulted in World War III as Magpies, Noisy Miners and Butcherbirds swooped, banging him on the head. The screeching of birds was deafening. He'd had enough of this and as you can guess *Curly* was back in front of the glass window quick smart.

And so why this strange behaviour? Greg Czechura from the Queensland Museum informed me that Bush Stone-curlews are nocturnal ground birds (although they can fly) and they have a haunting *Cuuuur-loooo* call. The males become aggressive towards other birds considered a potential threat, and that reflection in the glass door was a real bird to him.

Similar behaviour is found with Peewees and Butcherbirds who often attack house windows. This is an unfortunate result of urbanisation. Too much bushland is needlessly destroyed by developers.

Natural bushland has a number of layers - understorey of grasses, creepers and shrubs with trees in the top canopy. When I moved *Curly* to the fully mown park with 6 gumtrees there was no protection from above. A nocturnal bird is the enemy to daytime birds, hence the vicious attacks.

Our Curlew would be safe from these birds in the natural bushland, as would Honeyeaters and Fairywrens from natural hunters like crows.

Council's expectation is that our parks have to be mown and tidy. Instead, if areas are left 'untidy' with natural grasses, groundcovers and understorey shrubs under the tall trees we would provide valuable habitat for smaller birds and ground birds. So UNTIDY IS GOOD!

Very kind local residents relocated *Curly* to local bushland well away from suburbia and he hasn't been backyet!



Bush Stone-curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*)
(Illustration by Frank O'Shannassy)

This regular Nature Watch column is contributed by your local Centenary bushland care groups.

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