

THE SONG OF ABBOTTS BABBLER *TRICHASTOMA ABBOTTI* IN SOUTH SUMATRA

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On February 13 1985, in the Padang-Sugihan Wildlife Reserve, South Sumatra, tape recordings were made of the songs of a mated pair of Abbott's Babbler *Trichostoma abbotti* on an AIWA Model 360 tape recorder, and later analyzed with a UNIGON FFT spectrum analyzer. Figures 1, 2 and 3 were drawn from the resulting sonograms, representing three examples of song from the same babbler pair.

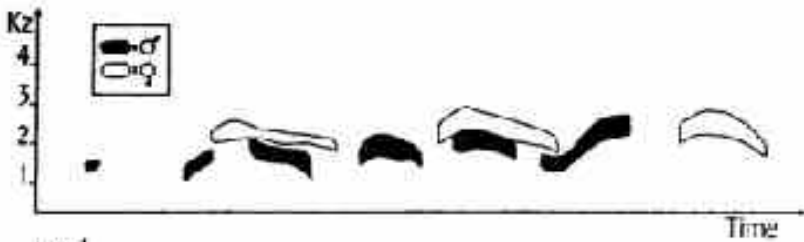


FIG. 1



FIG. 2

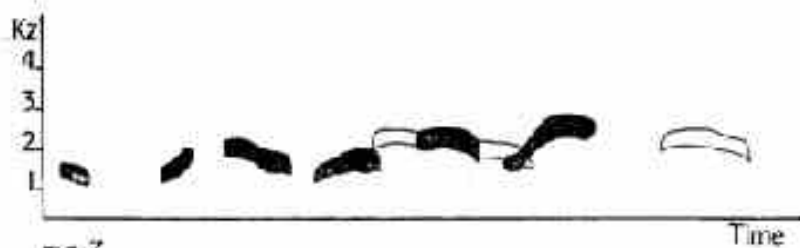


FIG. 3

Kukila 1985 2(3).

The song of the male bird (shown hatched) is composed of a sequence of six notes: a barely audible introductory note, followed by four evenly spaced slurred whistles, and ending with a loud upwards-inflected whistle. The female utters two or three sharp notes on the same pitch (shown in outline) in duet with the male. This duet is not synchronized as the female is not always in phase with the male's sequence.

The six-note song sequence of the male appears to differ markedly from published accounts of the song. Smythies (1981) describes the song of birds in Burma as either "a loud distinctive call of three notes, dropping in pitch on the middle note" or as "four notes, the first is low, the other three higher but all on the same pitch". P. Round (*pers comm*) has noted that the birds in Thailand also give a three- or four-note call. King *et al.* (1975) describe the call given in 'Malaya' (peninsular Malaysia) as 'two trisyllabic slurred whistles which often alternate, with two second pauses'. Similarly Medway & Wells (1976) describe it as 'two hard, three-note phrases with the stress on the third note'.

The available literature does not mention the accompaniment of the female, but Stuebing (1963) notes that several babbler species are well known as duet singers, where the male bird's song is accompanied by one or several notes on the same pitch given by the female.

Song differences in the Abbott's Babbler may reflect geographical isolation, and perhaps differences in actual races as well. The burmese birds would be nominate *T. a. abbotti* but Malay peninsula birds are more likely to be that of *T. a. olivaceum*, the latter being the same race as that said to occur in Sumatra (from Peters 1964). It should be noted that D. A. Holmes (*pers comm*) has noted a five or six note song being typical of the Borneo race *sirensis*. Further research on the songs of Abbott's Babbler in Malaysia, Borneo and Sumatra may suggest that the taxonomy of *T. a. olivaceum* in Sumatra should be revised.

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