

ATYPICAL SPONTANEOUS SONG BY AN ABBOTT'S BABBLER
TRICHACTOMA ABBOTTI

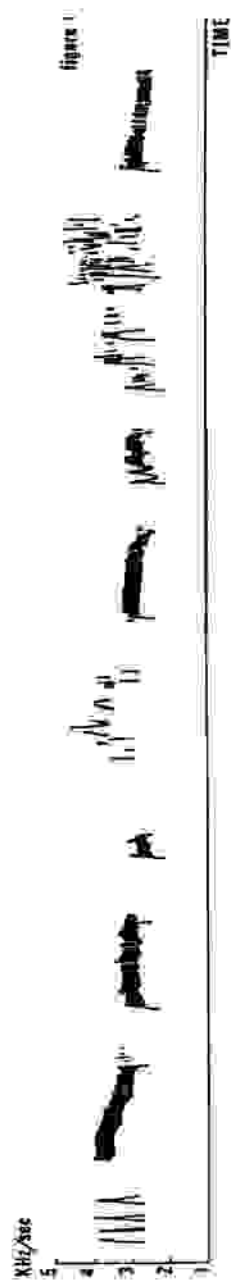
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(Received March 26, 1986)

The jungle babblers *Timaliidae* as a whole are renowned vocalists, more easily identified by their collectively varied songs than by their muted plumages. Surprisingly, the ornithological literature is incomplete concerning the repertoires of individual babbler species, as well as for noting regional (or racial) differences. The song of the Abbott's Babbler *Trichastoma abbotti* in south-eastern Sumatra has recently been the subject of a note in *Kukila* (Nash & Hash 1985), describing the full adult song of the male bird, and the duelling call notes of the female. Further studies of this species by the authors have revealed an unusual additional song by the male, a ten-note spontaneous 'foraging' song. This song was recorded in the padang-Sugihan Wildlife Reserve, South Sumatra province, at approximately 0745 hrs. on 12 September 1985, in riverine swamp forest. The recorded song was examined on a Unigon 4500 Uniscan Spectrum Analyzer, and the sonogram was made on a Kay Digital Sono-Graph 7800 set to a wide (300 Khz) band range.

The Abbott's Babbler is widely distributed in Asia, being found from Nepal to Assam, Burma, hailand, Kampuchea, Annam, Laos and Malaysia, and in Indonesia in Sumatra, Kalimantan and the small island of Bawean (from King *et al.* 1975, Smythies 1981). The typical song of the male Abbott's Babbler appears to be variable throughout its geographical range, with the song in south-eastern Sumatra typically being a six-note sequence of clear whistles, with a rising inflection (Nash & Nash 1985).

Spontaneous calls or songs are the most difficult to obtain on tape, as when the bird starts its songs, it is too late to turn on a tape recorder to pick up the whole sequence. As well, there is no way of knowing when a particular bird will sing an unusual series of notes, even if the species is occasionally known to do so. In the case of the Abbott's Babbler, no incidence of long spontaneous songs have ever been described. The Padang-Sugihan tape was obtained by following a pair of the babblers as they foraged through low vegetation, all the while keeping a tape-recorder in operation. No calls were played back to the birds to incite a response, and the resulting song flourish was totally unsolicited.

While foraging, one bird, later identified as the male by its song, uttered soft 'churr' notes while keeping its bill closed, at a rate of roughly two per second. At this point the female bird was also uttering occasional similar notes, proven by near-overlap examples with the male's notes on the tape. The male bird then began its song with a sharp stutter, followed by two loud whistles, the first slurred downwards, then followed by short sharp whistle, a splutter, two more loud whistles, a sharp stutter, another splutter, then a last whistle (see Figure 1). The male then continued with its 'churr' notes (Figure 2), delivered at first more emphatically than those previous to the song burst, then progressively softening the notes. Both birds continued foraging, and the female remained silent. The whole song sequence lasted just over three seconds (3.24).



Over a 14-month period spent mostly in the reserve, the authors heard the described song only once. In contrast, the regular song of the babbler was heard daily, usually in the early morning hours. At this time too little is known regarding irregular songs to provide an interpretation. Since the notes of the sequence are markedly different from the notes making up the regular song (see Nash & Mash 1985), the authors believe it to be a separate and repeatable song, even though it was only noted once. Had the long sequence been made up of an extended series of its typical song notes, the argument could have been made that it was a simple aberration. The spaced whistles and stutters of the recorded sequence could easily be overlooked, falling into the category of 'unattributed forest-bird songs'.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Mr. Allen Werden of the Department of Zoology, University of Toronto, Canada, for having made the sonogram from our tape recording. We also wish to thank World Wildlife Fund Indonesia for allowing us to publish data collected in Padang-Sugihan under the 3133 program.

Ringkasan

Kicauan sepuluh nada yang spontan dari jenis burung *Trichastoma abbotti* dapat direkam pada lk. jam 07.45 tanggal 12 September 1985 di hutan berawa di Suaka Margasastwa Padang-Sugihan, Sumatra Selatan. Rekaman ini diperiksa dengan Unigon 4500 Uniscan Spectrum Analyzer dan sonogramnya dibuat dengan Kay Digital Sono-Graph 7600 pada kisaran jarak gelombang 300 kHz. Kicauan panjang yang spontan dari jenis burung ini, belum pernah ada yang mempublikasikannya, karena suara panggilan dan kicauan panjang yang spontan sukar sekali direkam. Biasanya terlambat menjalankan alat perekam untuk memperoleh keseluruhan urutan panggilan atau kicauan spontan secara lengkap. Kicauan yang khas dari jenis burung *T. abbotti* di bagian tenggara Sumatra ini, adalah siulan enao nada yang meninggi secara berurutan.

References:

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