

Letters

Pheasants swimming Roger Mitchell's 1960 observation of a male Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* swimming (*Brit. Birds* 70: 120) recalls a similar event in 1952 concerning a female Pheasant, noted by P. J. Chadwick and me (*Brit. Birds* 46: 375).

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With reference to the note on a Pheasant swimming (*Brit. Birds* 70: 120), I should like to draw attention to one of the late Professor M. F. M. Meiklejohn's happy notes in the *Edinburgh Bird Bulletin* (3: 12). I quote this in full and believe that *British Birds* readers will relish the authentic MFMM flavour of the final sentence:

'PHEASANT AT SEA On 5th October 1952, about two miles south of Dunbar, I noticed a hen Pheasant sitting out at sea on a small isolated rock which was half awash. Between it and the shore were about a quarter of a mile of rock and rock pools, as well as 20 yards of open water. Presently a wave washed it into the sea and, after floating for a second or two, it took off from the surface and flew successfully to land. This is probably the only known case of a Pheasant doing something interesting.'

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Black-headed Gulls foot-paddling on grassland In a recent note (*Brit. Birds* 69: 180-181), Bernard King concluded that Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* have yet to be seen foot-paddling on grassland, which accorded with Dr N. Tinbergen's statement (*Brit. Birds* 55: 117-120) that 'Black-headed Gulls do not seem to apply paddling at all when catching earthworms . . . it is just possible that they are not heavy enough.'

In the Netherlands, foot-paddling by Black-headed Gulls on damp grassland is common behaviour. In the years following Dr Tinbergen's publication, H. Bresser and I paid special attention to foot-paddling by gulls on the damp meadows around Amsterdam and came to the conclusion that, from October to April, this technique is commonly used by both Black-headed and Common Gulls *L. canus* to catch earthworms (*De Levende Natuur* 68: 201-205). On several occasions, tapping with our fingers on the ground brought earthworms to the surface. These all belonged to the genus *Lumbricus*, in accordance with Mr King's observations.

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The function of mobbing Mobbing is a well-known phenomenon in which a number of birds, often of different species, unite to make an

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outcry when they detect a predator, or some other strange or sick bird; the behaviour tends to be most conspicuous when young birds leave the nest. Two obvious functions are to warn potential victims to lie low, while at the same time distracting the predator. The occurrence of mobbing has been widely used in ethological studies as a test of predator-recognition (Curio 1963, Galloway 1972), without much consideration of its function. Simmons (1952) has suggested that it arises as a result of a conflict between tendencies to attack and flee, Hinde (1954) that curiosity may also be involved, Marler (1956) that it may help indicate areas to avoid, and Kruuk (1976) that it is a means of communicating past bad experience. There appears to be a deficiency of accounts of the outcome of natural incidents, and at least one additional function is not mentioned in a review of animal defence mechanisms by Edmunds (1974). It may therefore be useful to describe what happens in nature.

During the fine, sunny afternoon of 29th June 1975, I was walking through a natural wood of Scots pines *Pinus sylvestris* in Glentanar, Grampian, when my attention was attracted by a distant clamour from at least six Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs*, and a pair each of Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus*, Coal Tits *Parus ater* and Treecreepers *Certhia familiaris*. Closer inspection revealed that the birds were hopping about agitatedly and approaching within 30 cm of the tail of an adder *Vipera berus* projecting from behind the piece of dead bark covering the Treecreepers' nest, 1 m above the ground on the bole of a pine tree. The snake had already swallowed one fledgling and killed two more when I intervened and allowed at least one more to escape. The birds took no notice of me until then, when they all departed, except the Treecreepers, which continued to express anxiety less obtrusively. I would never have found the snake if the birds had not directed my attention to it, and I doubt if they could have got rid of it in any other way. Doubtless any other predator, such as a bird of prey, would have been similarly attracted.

The function of the classical hue and cry was to embarrass a human malefactor and secure his apprehension by the first person strong enough. In the present case, it seemed unnecessary to warn other birds to lie low, and the snake did not appear in the least distracted, while the curiosity of most of the birds should soon have been satisfied; the birds were making a remarkable fuss if they were merely the prey of conflicting emotions. While it may have been advantageous for them to point out that snakes eat fledglings, this hardly required a racket that attracted my attention several hundred metres away. Usually, when birds express anxiety, they tend to use softer, more ventriiloquial notes which render their authors hard to locate (Marler 1957). It seems likely that the outcry under discussion, like that of a captive, was made with the deliberate purpose of attracting a second predator capable of putting an end to the first predator's activities. It seems possible that the discordant bird-calls used by hunters may sometimes also act in the same way, attracting either birds anxious to join in a mobbing, or predators in search of its object.

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Relation between mobbing and honey-guiding Support for the hue and cry function of mobbing suggested by Dr Bourne (see above) comes from an unexpected quarter, namely the guiding behaviour of some African honey-guides, particularly the Black-throated Honey-guide *Indicator indicator*, which was discussed at length by Friedmann (1955). The honey-guide attracts the attention of a person, a honey badger or ratel *Mellivora capensis*, a baboon (*Cercopithecidae*) or a mongoose (*Viveridae*) by flying back and forth within 5-15 m of it, or perching restlessly with wings arched and ruffled and tail fanned, calling continuously with churring and scolding notes. If followed, the honey-guide, still calling constantly, makes short, dipping flights from tree to tree, the tail fanned conspicuously, showing the white outer feathers, towards a goal up to 1 km away, which nearly always proves to be a nest of honeybees *Apis*. As the goal is neared, the bird becomes inconspicuous and perches silently, and, if the bees' nest is torn open for its honey by the follower, the honey-guide reaps its reward by feeding on residual wax, bees and probably honey.

Aspects of guiding behaviour are strongly reminiscent of mobbing. The chattering, restless movements and postural evidence of excitement are alike; other bird species are sometimes attracted to the guide, for instance the Bush-sparrow *Petronia dentata* and the Beautiful Long-tailed Sunbird *Nectarinia pulchella* (my own observations) and the Yellow-rumped Seed-eater *Serinus atrogularis* (Madge and Cunningham-van Someren 1975). Occasionally, guiding seems to lead to a snake, leopard *Panthera pardus*, or other predator; Friedmann dismissed these as accidental distractions from an original bees'-nest goal, but, while I agree, this does not detract from the possibility that guiding behaviour evolved from mobbing, where the mobbing was a hue and cry that effectively enlisted the symbiotic aid of a honey badger or a man.

Friedmann did not explicitly consider such a possibility, but Hoesch (1937) came close to that idea, arguing, from the observation that many species communicate to others the proximity of a dangerous enemy by means of special calls and postures, that honey-guides once regarded bees

as enemies and learned to lead powerful mammals to destroy them, the honeycomb being an incidental bonus. Toschi (1949) made an even closer approach and (to quote Friedmann's translation) thought that guiding 'partook of the same elements as the alarm reactions with which small birds indicate the presence of enemies'. He thought that the honeybee nest was a sufficiently important element in the African avian environment to provoke reactions quite different from those to other sources of food.

Guiding differs from mobbing in being directed at a source of food, not a predator. But the resemblances between the two behaviours are so strong as to indicate their likely phylogenetic affinity and, in so doing, to substantiate the hue and cry theory of mobbing function.

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Status of the Linnet in Shetland Mistaken claims that the Linnet *Acanthis cannabina* bred in Shetland, discussed by P. K. Kinnear (*Brit. Birds* 70: 128), seem to stem from instructions by E. V. Baxter and L. J. Rintoul in 'Notes on the status of birds in Scotland in 1934' (*Scot. Nat.* 1935: 35-36) to change its status from 'occasional visitor, has bred' to 'resident and passage migrant' in their book on *The Geographical Distribution and Status of Birds in Scotland* (1928). There was clearly something wrong, as that book notes the status of the Linnet in Shetland as 'occasional passage migrant'. Perhaps the instruction referred to the Outer Hebrides, the only faunal division in which the Linnet is given the status 'occasional visitor, has bred'. The annual updating of the *Geographical Distribution* was based partly on unpublished records. One may speculate on the original source of this information about the Linnet in Shetland; but I have found no published record.

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This seems to be a frightening example of the perpetuation of an author's error for several decades. Eds

Vipera berus, the common European adder or common European viper, is a venomous snake that is extremely widespread and can be found throughout most of Western Europe and as far as East Asia. The species is also the only venomous snake native to Great Britain. Known by a host of common names including common adder and common viper, adders have been the subject of much folklore in Britain and other European countries. They are not regarded as especially dangerous; the snake is not aggressive and usually Vipera berus - A female Adder basking in the spring sunshine Humming Slither. Cute Reptiles. Portrait of a puff adder (Bitis arietans) in defensive position, southern Africa stock photography. Vincent Diflumeri vincent. Spiders And Snakes Cool Snakes. Download free HD wallpaper from above link! #animals #SnakeWallpaper #SnakeWallpaperHd #SnakeWallpaper3d #SnakeWallpaperTumblr #SnakeWallpaper4k #SnakeWallpaperHd1080pDownload #SnakeWallpaperHd1080p #SnakeWallpaperForMobile #SnakeWallpaperIphoneX #SnakeWallpaperHdIphone. Angélica 15 años. Pretty Snakes Cool Snakes. Thermoregulation of the Adder, Vipera berus berus (L.). Litteratura Serpentium 10 (2): 62-70 - get paper here. Rijst, J. van der 2002. Pictures: Vipera berus, starting courtship fight. Revue Suisse de Zoologie 85: 165-595 - get paper here. Scali, Stefano; Mangiacotti, Marco; Sacchi, Roberto; Gentili, Augusto 2011. A tribute to Hubert Saint Girons: niche separation between Vipera aspis and V. berus on the basis of distribution models. Amphibia-Reptilia 32 (2): 223-233 - get paper here. Schiemenz, H. 1987. Post a journal. Share your thoughts, experiences and the tales behind the art. Literature. Submit your writing. Add to Favourites. Comment. Buy from \$4.79. 'Vipera Berus' - Spring 2016. By CID228. Watch. 2016 6d adder canon ef eos european snake spring stockholm sweden viper vipera berus cid228 huggorm. A small European adder shot yesterday. A sure sign of springs arrival! IMAGE DETAILS. Image size.