

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler



FAMOUSLY STRANGE

The striking male Satin Bowerbird is widely known for its elaborate bower, its collection of decorative blue objects that match its own blue plumage and its lack of involvement in rearing its young. But its life is a deep mystery! How does the male's sole focus on display, ensure the survival of the species?

The bower is not a nest; it is where he courts and mates with the females. Bowers must be defended; neighbouring males will steal sticks or ornaments. When his bower is complete, the male waits and guards, passing time by constantly fine-tuning his structure and rearranging the decorations. Bower quality and number of preferred decorations contribute to male mating success.

On the arrival of a female, he performs a ritualised display of strutting and bowing accompanied by complex vocalisations and mimicry linked to particularly large brains. If impressed, the female moves into the bower avenue for mating and then leaves; while the male readies himself for more females. Females reward intelligence by accepting the most skilled males.

The female Satin Bowerbird is olive-green above, off-white with dark scalloping below. She matures in three years. Female mate choice takes place in two stages: firstly, before building her

nest she visits bowers where the males are displaying; then, after she builds her nest high in a tree, she revisits the bowers, makes her choice and mates. She then lays her eggs and rears the two young.



The Satin Bowerbird is ancient and intelligent! It is the product of 50 million years of evolution. So the process of survival that they have evolved is certainly effective. But it is a strange process; very few other species allow the male to avoid all brooding and feeding of their young and make the male wait seven years before maturity.

Happy mystery birding!

~ Jim

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Image: Male and Female Satin Bowerbirds at the bower; Male away from bower.
<http://what-when-how.com/birds/satin-bowerbird-birds>