

Lionel

Deep Slaty Woodpecker



Credit: Ong Kee Chow, NUSH Class of 2023

When choosing a scope for debate, defining what it means for the deep slaty woodpecker to be “The Best Bird” is a challenge. I will instead focus on demonstrating and highlighting the superiority and excellence that this bird embodies.

Immediately recognisable as a woodpecker, its sharp pointed beak stands out. Donning grey feathers, whitish spots on their nape and a pale red throat. Birds are often viewed for their beauty and in this case the woodpecker is stunning. Its gentle grey plumage coupled nicely with the other gentle colours on its throat and nape speaks volumes of their elegance. The Great Slaty Woodpecker with its long neck provides the appearance of dominance, head slightly tilted back and forward looking it bears the gaze of wonder and focus.

It is distinctly the largest woodpecker in the world that stands at 48-50cm (about half the length of a baseball bat). This is significant for it as a bird. Being a bird of larger size brings limitations in flight, restricts movement, and requires it to ingest more food to survive. Nevertheless, it's able to survive at such a large size (relative to other woodpeckers) with ease amongst each other without being endangered. Attribute this to its feeding methods, banging against the bark of trees and brooding in nests.

Its call is simple, poised, and precise, making a clear *woikwoikwoik* sound. Something that truly demands attention.

Pavana

The Common Kingfisher

The Eurasian kingfisher, commonly referred to as the common kingfisher, is a little yet strong bird that is adored by nature lovers and birdwatchers all over the world. The common kingfisher is frequently rated as the best bird, and we shall examine why in this essay.

The common kingfisher is, first and foremost, breathtakingly beautiful. It is stunning with its vivid blue and orange plumage. It is frequently referred to as the "jewel of the river" due to its striking colour, which makes it easy to detect even from a distance. But the common kingfisher's striking colors are not simply for show. In addition, they function as a kind of camouflage, assisting the bird in blending in with its surroundings and fending off predators.



Figure 1 A Common Kingfisher

The common kingfisher, in addition to having a beautiful appearance, is an expert at surviving. It is a good hunter despite its small size and can catch fish that are up to twice as heavy as it is. It is a fearsome predator with a sharp beak and keen eyesight, and it is frequently observed diving into the water to catch its victim.

But the common kingfisher's capacity for survival extends beyond its capacity for hunting. Moreover, it may survive in a range of habitats, including inland waterways and coastal regions. It can even acclimate to artificial environments like canals and man-made ponds. Despite habitat loss and other environmental challenges, the common kingfisher has been able to maintain a stable population thanks to its flexibility.

The common kingfisher is a strong bird, but it's also a fascinating creature to watch. It is renowned for its unusual calls and courtship behaviors, which are both fascinating and entertaining. The intricate courtship rituals of the male common kingfisher, which include giving the female fish and putting on aerial acrobatics displays, are particularly noteworthy.



Figure 2 Common Kingfisher after a successful catch

Finally, people have revered the common kingfisher for ages, and it has cultural value. The common kingfisher, for instance, is frequently portrayed in literature and art in Japan where it is thought to be a sign of luck and fortune. The common kingfisher was historically depicted as a sign on coins and crests in Europe, where it has long been connected to aristocracy.

In conclusion, there is a strong reason why the common kingfisher is regarded as the best bird. It is a true gem of the natural world because of its breathtaking beauty, amazing hunting prowess, adaptability, entertaining behavior, and cultural value. The common kingfisher is a bird that is likely to enthrall and inspire anyone, whether they are avid birdwatchers, nature enthusiasts, or just those who value the beauties of the natural world.

References:

<https://wiki.nus.edu.sg/display/TAX/Alcedo+atthis+-+Common+Kingfisher>
<https://www.birdspot.co.uk/bird-brain/how-do-kingfishers-catch-fish>

Danyson

Greater Lophorina



What do you think of when you see the picture above? Is it two random cyan spots and a brush of cyan? Or is it a pair of eyes and a large mustache? Does it intrigue you? Or does it scare you?

Perhaps, it was the *Cheshire Smile* all along! **N O.** seriously. It is the F A C E of

THE GREATER LOPHORINA (*Lophorina Superba*).

Also known as the Superb Bird Of Paradise, these birds are in fact birds. "Then why does it look like a man with a moustache?" You might ask. Look at the zoomed-out picture below.

The picture above displays the male SBOP (Superb Bird of Paradise). Males, from beak to tail, have body lengths up to 26cm, while females are 25cm. The male bird is black with an iridescent green crown, blue-green breast cover and a long velvety black erectile cape covering his back. The female is a reddish-brown bird with brownish barred buff below. This bird species has an unusually low population of female birds, leading to fierce and intense competition between the male and female birds. This has led the species to have one of the most elaborate courtship displays in the avian world.

There are two main stages of courtship display. The first display, known as the *initial display activity*, involves a series of relatively simple behaviors. This is followed by a more elaborate courtship display, known as the *high intensity display*. After carefully and meticulously preparing a "dance floor", the male first attracts a female with a loud call. After the curious female bird approaches, his folded black feather cape and cyan chest feathers shield would spring upward and spread widely in symmetry around his head, instantly transforming the frontal view of the male bird into a spectacular ellipse -shaped creature that rhythmically snaps his tail feathers against each other, while hopping in frantic circles around the female. The average female SBOP rejects 15-20 potential suitors before consenting to mate. The show that males put on to attract females can be a long process that takes up many hours in a day.

The SBOP is distributed across rain forests New Guinea. Its habitats reside commonly in rain forests and forest edges in Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. Sometimes they can be spotted on mountainous habitats in these forests, and they usually create their nest at the top of trees. Although

heavily hunted for its plumes, the SBOP is evaluated as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Elgin

White Cockatoo



The Blue Mountains are a mountain range located near the eastern coast of New South Wales, Australia, popular among tourists and retirees alike for its quiet atmosphere and scenic views. I got up early and headed deep into the Blue Mountains from downtown Sydney on a tour bus, with high expectations of seeing the promised vast expanses of peak, rock and forest, stretching hundreds of kilometers on a clear day. Alas, my seemingly endless ill luck struck again, and the Mountains were fogged to oblivion, massive clouds of mist obscuring the heavenly view and reducing visibility to just ten meters.

During the journey the tour bus made a stop at Lawson and we grabbed coffee and provisions on its main street. The temperature had dropped to a refreshing 14 degrees Celsius, and without a jacket on it felt like the body was being soaked in an extra strong mint bath, something to indulge in after years of unbearable Singaporean tropical weather. Just after leaving the café, I spotted three exotic-looking sulfur-crested white cockatoos rummaging for sustenance amidst the bags of refuse, a stark contrast to their pristine white feather coats. I reached out for my camera and snapped this photograph, not knowing that it would be massively helpful two weeks later when we had to do a photojournalism assignment on birds. These cockatoos, as it turns out, are very common along Australia's east coast, have exhibited intelligent behavior and live extremely long lives in captivity (70 years or more).

The tour guide later told us that white cockatoos were common and more friendly to humans, compared to black cockatoos which were shy and harder to spot. It felt reassuring to know that

these birds were of least concern, maintaining healthy populations in the wild, their beautiful coats adorning the trees of Australia.

We later visited a waterfall, went on a steep cable car and train ride, explored the Australian rainforest, dined at a war memorial place and took an aerial tram from one peak to another, the mountains staying stubbornly cloudy throughout despite the tour guide's assurances. But the experience of the Blue Mountains was all that mattered, and I returned to my hotel room feeling content.

Eleos

Exclamatory Paradise-Whydah

EEK! How sus! What's that?



I am an
Exclamatory
Paradise-
Whydah yes 👍

An Exclamatory Paradise-Whydah? (What a scary name!)

Is this not a large and scary name? Let me break it down for you.

Exclamatory Paradise-Whydah (*Vidua Interjecta*)

Looks like a flying
exclamation mark
(change my mind)

Part of *Viduidae*
Family, also called
"Whydah"

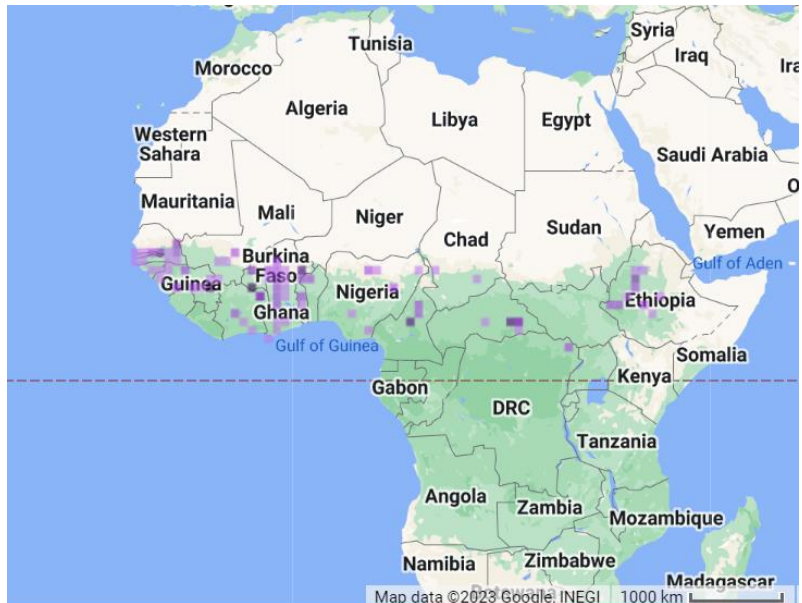
See? It's not so hard after all.

Exclamatory implies that the bird's shape is extremely like an exclamation mark, given its extremely long, flowing tails of breeding males, which brings us to the *Paradise-Whydah*.

Whydahs are part of the *Viduidae* family of birds, which are finch-like birds that leech on the parenting abilities of *Pylatias* (the poor species of bird that *Whydahs* prefer).

Whydahs will typically lay about two to four eggs in its victim's nest. Both species of eggs are white in colour, while the *Whydah* eggs will be slightly larger. From the nest, out will hatch little ~~exclamation marks~~ Exclamatory Paradise-Whydahs. However, females and infant *Vidua Interjecta* are extremely hard to distinguish.

Grown, breeding males are easiest to distinguish among the *Viduidae* family. They are largely black all over, with a long tail that widens near the end. A key distinguishing trait is their lack of a golden-buff coloured nape (back of neck), with a chestnut nape taking its place. Males will typically have a short, sharp, and high-pitched *Twik Twik Twik* calls.



These birds are native to the western tip of the African continent, with some spread in Ethiopia as well. However, despite their small range, these “Exclamation marks” will not be disappearing from our skies anytime soon as their population appears to be stable and does not appear to be at risk.

Take a moment to digest all this information you just learnt about ~~punctuation and language~~ *Vidua Interjecta*. It may seem distant and odd at first, but over time you **will** appreciate its special shape and nice colours!

References:

<https://ebird.org/species/ltpwhy1>