

## SHORT NOTE

### Injury feigning at Yellowhammer's nest

Injury feigning by Yellowhammers (*Emberiza citrinella*) has occasionally been reported in Britain (Witherby *et al.* 1943 'The Handbook of British Birds' Vol. 1, p.114).

I have been unable to find reported any such occurrences in the New Zealand literature available to me, and so the following observation may be unique for New Zealand.

On 15 January 1991 I approached a Yellowhammer's nest which I had visited previously on about 5 occasions. At about 2 m I noticed the female half-standing over the nest. I paused and watched for a few seconds. Suddenly the female, with wings continuously spread, fluttered into the grass and moved away from me until she was about 1 - 2 m from the nest. She paused momentarily and then continued fluttering across the grasses to a point 7 m distant, where she flew straight from the ground up into a willow. Being familiar with the 'broken-wing' display of dotterels and oystercatchers I have no doubt the Yellowhammer was feigning injury in a similar way.

**Discussion:** I first found the nest because quite unexpectedly the Yellowhammer flew out from the bank as I was passing. On every subsequent visit she was not present as I approached. On the occasion of the injury-feigning I was within 2 m and she was still there. I gained the distinct impression as she stood half-crouched that I had surprised her. Perhaps it was my sudden appearance very close to the nest that prompted the injury-feigning display.

Writing about 'mock injury' display in Goldfinches (*Carduelis carduelis*) at Havelock North, Campbell (1972) observed it happened when the adult was "disturbed unexpectedly either while hatching was occurring or brooding very young nestlings" and "It appeared that the response was triggered as the eggs hatched and was strongest at this point. It disappeared after the 4th day of the nestling period".

As the Yellowhammer I observed had one chick about 3 or 4 days old (and two unhatched eggs) the response I saw may have been due not only to my unexpected appearance but also to the stage of the nesting cycle.

Grateful thanks to Peter Bull for comments on this note.

### Reference

CAMPBELL, P.O. 1972, The Feeding Ecology and Breeding Biology of the Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis* Linnaeus 1758) at Havelock North, New Zealand. MSc thesis, Massey University.

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