

Passerines are the largest group of birds. They are small to medium sized land birds found worldwide, except on Antarctica. All species have four toes, three pointing forward and one back, well-adapted for perching. Most species are song-birds, with complex musical calls, but there are exceptions (e.g. crows). They show great diversity of form, behaviour and breeding biology.

MYNA *Acridotheres tristis*

Locally abundant Asian introduction

24 cm, 125 g. Cheeky brown bird with jaunty walk. Adult cinnamon brown with glossy black head and neck, white undertail and underwing; yellow legs, bill and bare patch of skin near eye. Sexes alike. Juvenile has dark brown head, paler bill and facial skin. In flight, prominent white patches on wings, and white-tipped tail. Roosts communally all year, largest in winter; small flocks converge at dusk and depart at dawn. Feeds mainly on the ground, often at roadsides. Voice jangling; song a rapid medley of raucous gurgling, chattering and bell-like notes. **Habitat:** Parks, gardens, orchards and farmland, sometimes on forest margins. **Breeding:** Oct–Mar. [Sp 320]



STARLINGS and MYNAS

Sturnidae

106 species in Africa, Europe and Asia; 2 introduced to New Zealand.

a glossy sheen of purple or green. The bill is straight and slender, and they are generally omnivorous. Most nest in holes. Their calls are highly varied, and they often mimic other species.

Medium-sized birds of open country and forest. Most species are dark, sometimes with

320. MYNA *Acridotheres tristis*

Plate 73

Size: 24 cm, 125 g
Distribution: Natural breeding range is from Afghanistan east through India and Sri Lanka to Bangladesh, but either through introductions or natural range extension in the 1900s they have reached much of Southeast Asia. They have been widely introduced around the world and are established in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Solomons, New Caledonia, Fiji, Western Samoa, Cook Islands, Hawai'i and some other oceanic islands. Several hundred birds were introduced to New Zealand, mainly to the South Island, by Acclimatisation Societies and private individuals between 1870 and 1877.

about 1940, they spread quickly to colonise the Volcanic Plateau and reached Auckland by about 1947, Tauranga and Rotorua about 1950, the Bay of Islands 1960 and Kaitiāia 1965. At the same time, they were disappearing from the southern North Island. They were once numerous in Wellington, Masterton and Palmerston North, but apart from a small population based on the Masterton Refuse Tip, and odd other birds, the southern limit is a line from Wanganui to Waipukurau, and this is still shifting slowly northwards. Mynas are locally abundant in the northern North Island in farmland, orchards and suburban gardens, and have colonised some offshore islands such as Poor Knights, Waiheke, Kawau and Great Barrier. They rarely venture far into forests, but can be common on the forest edge.

Mynas persisted in the South Island (Nelson, Christchurch and Dunedin) until about 1890, but they fared better in the North Island and by the 1930s they were split into two populations: one in the east from Waipukurau to East Cape, and the other in the west from Wanganui to the Waikato. From

There is no evidence of migration within New Zealand. In winter, large flocks are often seen flying purposefully as they converge

on favoured roosts; these flocks can travel 10+ km between their roosting and feeding sites each day. Favoured roosts are in isolated stands of tall trees.

Except for incubating females, Mynas spend the night at communal roosts, some of which are of 1000+ birds. Territorial birds normally have a bout of intense calling for 5–15 minutes when they arrive in their territories in the early morning. Males call more often than females, and pairs sometimes duet. The territorial call is a rowdy medley of notes, raucous, gurgling, chattering, even bell-like, in rapid sequence. Adults with young utter a harsh 'skwark', and the call of flying young is a noisy, persistent 'chi-chi-chi'. At their communal roosts, Mynas maintain a noisy chattering even well after nightfall and before dawn.

Population: Locally abundant in northern New Zealand.

Feeding: Diet is a mix of invertebrates and fruits, scraps found at rubbish tips, on roads and from places where stock and poultry are fed. They also eat eggs, chicks and lizards. The main invertebrates eaten include beetle larvae and adults, bugs, caterpillars, worms, flies, snails and spiders, mainly taken from the ground and especially along roads, where many insects are killed by cars. They also feed by pecking prey from the surface in short pasture and grain stubble. In Hawke's Bay, the main fruit eaten was black nightshade and fallen fruits in orchards, but they occasionally inflict damage to grape and other fruit crops.

Breeding: Pairs stay together year after year and keep the same territory in successive years. The nest is a cup of dry grass, twigs and leaves, usually in the hole of a tree, cliff, building or other structure, but sometimes they will nest in a thick tangle of vegetation. Mynas readily use 20 x 20 x 30 cm deep nest boxes with an 8 cm diameter entrance, especially if raised 2–3 m off the ground in an open situation. Laying is from mid-October to early March, mostly in November and January. Each pair usually raises two broods a year.

In the hand: Males are larger than females: wing 131–142–150 mm cf. 127–135–145 mm.

They lay 1–3–4–6 greenish-blue eggs (29 x 22 mm, 7.5 g) daily in the early morning. Incubation starts with the laying of the last egg and is mainly by the female during the day, but by the female alone at night, for 13–14 days. Both parents feed the nestlings during the 20–25–32-day fledging period and for c. 3 weeks after leaving the nest. Juveniles form small flocks when they become independent. Many young form pairs when 9 months old, but only a few females attempt to breed in their first year. In Hawke's Bay, some colour-banded Mynas lived over 12 years.

Reading: Councilman, J.J. 1974. *Notornis* 21: 318–333. Cunningham, J.M. 1948. *Notornis* 3: 57–64. Moeed, A. 1976. *Notornis* 23: 246–249. Wilson, P.R. 1973. Unpubl PhD thesis, Victoria Univ.

Behaviour: In the breeding season, they are strongly territorial, and neighbouring pairs often fight furiously; however, in autumn and winter they often feed in flocks of 5–20 birds.