

CUCKOOS, CATERPILLARS AND CAPE LILACS



FOLLOWING the article on caterpillars in Cape Lilacs in the April Western Wildlife, I would be interested to know whether any other readers have noticed a correlation between Cape Lilac caterpillars and Pallid Cuckoos, which, according to the booklet "Common Birds of the South West Forests", feed on hairy caterpillars. At Donnybrook we have Pallid Cuckoos visit our block in spring and our neighbours have beautiful lush Cape Lilac trees. No sign of caterpillar infestation. Have the caterpillars simply not caught up with our neighbours' trees yet, or is the Pallid Cuckoo really a worthwhile ally in the effort to gain control of the creatures?

In Bunbury, where at least two varieties of hairy caterpillars indulge in home invasions every spring in certain areas, I did not hear or see Pallid Cuckoos in the ten years we lived there. Also, do these cuckoos parasitise the nests of 28s and kookaburras?

Hannah Kendall, Donnybrook.

Lesley Brooker, of CSIRO, comments: "Pallid Cuckoos are fond of hairy caterpillars and we've had a juvenile spend three weeks feeding on them in a Cape Lilac. They are nomadic, so may not always be present in a district when caterpillars are infesting the Cape Lilacs. Cuckoos in general parasitise small songbirds - none successfully parasitise parrots or kookaburras. In WA, Pallid Cuckoos prefer the larger honeyeater species such as miners and wattlebirds."

(Note Peter Langlands' article about hairy caterpillars on p 12 - Ed.)