DISCOVERY OF THE MONTH

25(86), November 1, 2014

ISSN 2278–5469 EISSN 2278–5450

Discovery

Discovery of superb lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*) by Thomas Davies on 4 November 1800

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Publication History

Received: 23 September 2014

Accepted: 12 October 2014

Published: 1 November 2014

Citation

Brindha V. Discovery of superb lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*) by Thomas Davies on 4 November 1800. *Discovery*, 2014, 25(86), 6

The superb lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*) is a pheasant-sized Australian song bird. The superb lyrebird is featured on the reverse side of the Australian 10 cent coin. The superb lyrebird can be found in the forests of southeastern Australia, from southern Victoria to southeastern Queensland. Its diet consists mainly of small invertebrates found on the forest floor or in rotting logs. In the 1930s a small number were introduced to Tasmania amongst ill-founded fears it was in danger of becoming extinct. The Tasmanian population is currently thriving. Now widespread and common throughout its large range, the Superb Lyrebird is evaluated as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Superb lyrebirds breed in the depth of winter. Adult males start singing half an hour before sunrise from roosts high above the forest floor. Superb lyrebirds sing less often at other times of year but a stroll through their habitat on a rainy or misty day will sometimes find them active. It has a promiscuous mating system. During the breeding season adult females and males defend separate territories and only females care for young. A female may visit several males before she mates but it is not known if she mates more than once. The female lays a single egg and builds a domed nest often camouflaging it with ferns or moss. The chick spends about nine months with the female before becoming independent. When lyrebirds detect potential danger they will pause and scan their surroundings, then give an alarm call. Having done so, they will either flee the vicinity on foot, or seek cover and freeze. The scientific name has been previously given as *Menura superba*. The bird was first illustrated and described scientifically as such by Major-General Thomas Davies on 4 November 1800 to the Linnean Society of London. His work shows the tail feathers correctly displayed. The Australian Museum has fossils of lyrebirds dating back to about 15 million years ago.