

Razor Grinder Cicada

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On our last Bird Observers' Outing for 2010, the cicada calls were quite intrusive. We were able to identify six different species, and one of the predominant sounds was that of the Razor Grinder. It has been named for its call which sounds somewhat like the grating of metal. In the numbers that were present on that day, the sound can be quite harsh on human ears. I wonder how birds tolerate it as many of them have such acute hearing.

The Razor Grinder (*Henicopsaltria eydouxii*) is found from west of Bundaberg to southern New South Wales in lowlands and mountains up to 1000 metres, extending well west of the Great Divide in parts of its range. It is quite common in South East Queensland and is one of the species at the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary. It prefers sclerophyll forest and rainforest margins, especially the trunks and large limbs of eucalypts, often only a few metres from the ground, as was the photographed specimen. It is most obvious at the sanctuary on the large eucalypt near the Information Centre, but although populations emerge from November to March, it seems a much shorter period (part of December and January) that it is heard at the sanctuary.

This is one of the larger cicadas with a forewing length about 50 to 55 mm. It is not highly coloured excepting for the opercula (which protect the tympana – the hearing organs) and sometimes the tymbal covers which can be orange-brown. The tympanum is located under the abdomen against the thorax and the tymbal is located on the back of the abdomen where it adjoins the thorax and is the organ by which the male produces sound. The wing infuscations (markings along the veins) are variable, but generally show as a zigzag on apical cells 2, 3, and 4. Veins along the wing margins are marked quite strongly in this species.

A females lays about 300 eggs in slits which she makes on tree branches. She sites them so that as they hatch, they can drop to the ground and dig until they reach eucalyptus roots where they feed throughout their whole nymphal stage. The species is copious some years.

