

## Courting Albert's lyrebird

**C**ROUCHING BEHIND the enormous buttress root of a black booyong in World Heritage-listed Lamington National Park, 80 kilometres south of Brisbane, I waited in anticipation.

Working as a guide for O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse, in the heart of the national park, I joined wildlife-documentary maker Glen Threlfo in search of a male Albert's lyrebird. We'd tracked the elusive rufous-coloured bird, nicknamed "George", to his display platform by following his echoing call. Unlike the better-known superb lyrebird,

which performs its courtship display atop a meticulously maintained earth mound, the smaller Albert's lyrebird uses a concealed platform of interlaced vines.

As we sat still and silent, concealed behind some bushes, George began singing his heart out. His smooth territorial call resounded through the rainforest, quickly interspersed with note-perfect renditions of other birds' calls including the laughing kookaburra, satin bowerbird, eastern whipbird and crimson rosella. As he sang, he inverted his 50-centimetre tail over his head

and body to form a silvery-white dome that almost cocooned him. Plucking at the vines with each foot, he held us spellbound.

This performance lasted 20 minutes. Then he stopped, ruffled his feathers and dissolved into the dense undergrowth. In the ensuing silence, Glen turned to me and said, "Why don't you try to photograph his display? There's only ever been a few successful photographs." I decided to take on the challenge, but because the mating season was almost over, I had to wait nine months for an opportunity.



Albert's lyrebird is found in the undergrowth of dense subtropical rainforest straddling the New South Wales-Queensland border. It spends its days foraging for insects, roosting at night in a tall tree and working its way down at sunrise. A poor flier, it's extremely shy and when disturbed, runs quickly away.

The following winter, I set out into the bitter cold each day at 5.30 a.m. and then sat for hours in a self-constructed hide. Male Albert's lyrebirds have a number of display platforms within their territories, so I hoped I'd selected the right one.

I'd anticipated that my project would take up to two weeks. It took almost two months. I didn't sight George for weeks, and when he did appear, it took several attempts to get a good shot of him. Finally, luck was with me. George was back on his vines and his courtship display was even more energetic than usual. He was in a frenzy as he danced, called and mimicked – even making the sounds of a crackling bonfire. He tugged the vines so ferociously that the surrounding palm lilies and lilly-pillies shook with him.

The three-month mating season was drawing to an end, and George was going all out to let any nearby females know where to find him. I wondered how they could resist.

Michael Snedec



MICHAEL SNEDEC

*The elusive Albert's lyrebird (above) performs its electrifying courtship display on a platform of interlaced vines. Michael Snedec is one of just a few people who've managed to photograph this extremely timid bird. Each morning for two months, Michael spent hours crouching motionless in the cramped hide he made (right), quietly listening and waiting.*



GLEN THRELFORD