



Fig. 2. Tiger Snake after a successful hunt.

Bird's nest in birdbath!

On 13 January 2014, while walking with my six-year-old grandson near the eastern end of Normanby Road in the Melbourne suburb of Notting Hill (Melway map 70 J10), we found a bird's nest on the footpath near a eucalypt. The nest was made of thin strips of bark and lined with a white, fluffy synthetic material. I put it in our 'collection bag of interesting items', brought it home, and later left it on the ground in our garden. The next day, when I went to refill one of our birdbaths, I was surprised to find the bird's nest soaking in it.

I took the nest out of the birdbath and put it back where I had left it the previous day. On 8 February 2014, I found what was left of the nest in the same birdbath, and this time took the opportunity to photograph it (Fig. 1).

Two Little Ravens visit this birdbath regularly, often bringing pieces of bread, and occasionally bones, which they soak in the water. They are the only creatures in this area that would be likely to transport the nest to the birdbath, and presumably did so because they thought the white synthetic material might be edible when soaked. The distance between the birdbath and the place where I had put the nest is 2.8 m, and the bath is 300 mm above the ground. The nest was very light in weight.

Soaking food in birdbaths is a common behaviour in corvids and has been reported frequently (e.g. Inglis 1991; McMillan 1992; Slee 1992; Reid and Reid 1996; Slee 1996; Mackenzie and Mackenzie 2008), but to date I have found no reference to corvids soaking a bird's nest.

Savage (1995: 2–3) gave an interesting account of a crow that took water to its food, rather than food to the water:

In the late 1960s, a ... crow lived at the Allee Laboratory of Animal Behavior at the University of Chicago, where ... it was fed partly on dried mash which its keepers were supposed to moisten. But sometimes (being merely human) they forgot. The crow, undaunted, would then pick up a small plastic cup that had been provided as a toy, dip it into a water trough, carry the filled cup across the room to the food and empty the water onto the mash ... The bird had not been taught to do this.'

At our birdbath, bones and bread are again the order of the day.

References

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Fig. 1. Remains of bird's nest soaking in birdbath.