

A Private Audience

© Alan Stuart
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This morning, in conditions superb,
Walking alone in the Gloucester Tops,
I chanced to see a rufous scrub-bird
Ascending a sapling in small hops.
At around about my shoulder height,
It finally reached its calling perch.
I could have wished for no better sight,
For the climax of my hopeful search.

The bird stayed there silently at first,
Surveying all of the land around.
The shadows lifted in a sunburst
But up until now it made no sound.
All of a sudden it puffed its breast
And at the same time tossed back its head.
And I can count myself truly blessed
That I was there to watch what it said.

Chip! Chip! Chip! Chip!
Was the deafening call which it made.
And although I was standing quite near,
The bird was completely unafraid.
Chip! Chip! Chip! Chip!
Repeating it again and again
Chip! Chip! Chip! Chip!
Was that small bird's echoing refrain.

I stood there transfixed, said not a word,
Wedged tight in the dense understory
Whilst this usually most cryptic bird
"Chipped" away loudly, in full glory.
Then came various whistles and cheeps,
Perhaps uttered for a change of style,
Close followed by a few bouts of seeps
And some mimicry, once in a while.

Now yet again came more chipping calls,
Resounding across the wide ravine,
Announcing its territory walls
That its rivals must not contravene.
It stayed for ten minutes in that tree,
Calling non-stop, and with all its might.
Afterwards it turned away from me
And glided quietly out of sight.

I slowly backtracked to the main path
From my vantage point five metres in
I knew not whether to cry or laugh
And my poor head was in a mad spin.
I felt as though I was in a trance,
My heart was thumping with emotion,
I am so thankful I had the chance
To see the source of the commotion.