

Dervobirds

Beleard sat in the comfy armchair in the tree's living room, sipped his tea, and opened his copy of *Nelverod's Modern Ornithology*. He browsed through the pages of the thick tome until he reached the section with the descriptions of species.

The dervobird is a native songbird found throughout the continent, he read. While they generally prefer the warmer and temperate southern regions, dervobirds are nevertheless commonly observed nesting even beyond the northern mountain ranges. They shy easily and keep away from humans and settlements, although some can be observed scavenging for food in human proximity during winter months.

"I am *not* cleaning this!" Yara yelled in the kitchen.

"We are not having this discussion again," Vulfgaar's voice barked through the kitchen door. "It's your turn to do the dishes."

Dervobirds are omnivores. Their diet consists mainly of insects, seeds, berries, and other fruit, but they are also known to feast on lizards and small mammals on rare occasions. Furthermore, they will happily help themselves to animal carcasses given the opportunity.

"I said I'd do the dishes, not clean up whatever war crime you committed in the oven!"

"A sustained wall of fire has been perfectly legal warfare for over 167 years."

"You're not supposed to wage war on the *chicken*, you goob!"

"I didn't hear you complain while you were stuffing yourself with dinner!"

"Stuffing myself? *Stuffing myself*? How dare you! I didn't have any more than any

of you two!”

Female dervobirds are larger than their male counterparts, measuring eight to ten inches. Their plumage is glossy black throughout with a long tail. With their blackish-brown legs and an orange-yellow bill, they are easily confused with male blackbirds if it weren't for the blackbirds' yellow eye-rings (see page 192ff.). The male dervobirds grow six to eight inches in length and are easily recognizable due to their sooty-brown black-speckled plumage, their reddish head and crest, and green speculum feathers. Their bills are yellowish-brownish and their legs are black.

“Be that as it may, you didn't complain about it anyway, so my point still stands.”

“And what point would that be, exactly? Huh?”

“That you were perfectly happy to get your share of dinner, but not your share of chores!”

Dervobirds preferably nest in rock and tree cavities, where they build a flimsy stick nest. The female typically lays two or three eggs in late spring and early summer. Pairs and small family parties establish a territory, sometimes lasting year-round, sometimes just for a season. They appear not to migrate any great distance but will make local movements with the seasons.

“Just look at this, Vulf! It's baked into the tray! There's no cleaning this!”

“Nonsense, that's nothing a bit of scrubbing and a simple advanced water burst spell won't clear.”

“I'm not flooding the house with water spells to clean up after your lack of cooking finesse!”

“Hah! Lack of cooking finesse! You're the one to talk!”

It is a common misconception that the dervobird song is performed for courtship purposes. Instead, territory is marked and established through male dervobirds' singing. Should a challenger appear, a pair or family party who has already bonded will commonly engage them together.

"I don't have time for this, Yara, I have more important things to attend to."

"And you're free to attend them as soon as you've cleaned up your mess."

"Look, I'm getting tired of this being a thing every week."

"Then stop leaving me with uncleanable messes to sort out!"

Vulfgaar sighed. "Do you want me to teach you a refined water burst spell that won't flood the entire house? Even a wizard like you could get the hang of that in a day or two."

"A wizard like me? A *wizard like me*?"

Courtship proceeds with male dervobirds attempting to impress a female through what is now believed a feat of endurance. A hopeful male will approach the female in a series of small skips and monotonous chirps while flustering up and flapping his wings. An interested female will chirp back at them, while uninterested ones turn their backs on the males. The female will then test the male through a series of picks and wing slaps. The male is expected to maintain his posture and chirp throughout. Should a male endure successfully, the female may pick him as a mate. Previously, the seemingly aggressive behaviour of the females was thought to be a forceful rejection of over-eager males as it resembles a violent altercation, but today the overwhelming consensus is that it is indeed a courtship ritual, albeit a somewhat unusual one among birds.

Vulfgaar's groan as air escaped his lungs was followed by the sound of a metallic tray crashing on the floor. Yara stomped loudly through the living room with clenched fists and shoulders and disappeared into the corridor. Soon after, a breathless Vulfgaar leaned onto the kitchen door frame, one hand holding his stomach.

"You're still doing the dishes today, Yara!" he called after her, yet catching his breath.

"Hm," Beleard exhaled.

"Can you believe her?" Vulf turned to him.

"Don't look at me," Beleard mumbled without looking up and turned a page. "I'm *definitely* not doing the dishes today."