



The Discovery of the Lesser Spotted Blotched Woobler

BY Barry S. Brunswick

It was after a solid sixteen hours four wheel driving down the bumpy road. Our necks were sore not to mention our backsides. The road had been dusty and pot holed and that was as long as we could describe it as a road. The rest of the trail was across country. The thickest jungle was our path for the last two hours. The call of the birds and insects of the jungle would be our sound track for the night as we camped below the endless canopies. This can be quite unnerving to ones used to a carpet beneath their feet and a solid roof above their heads.

What were we doing in this part of Africa? Well, there was me, two guides, a camera crew and a sound man and we were on the trail of an extremely elusive animal, the Lesser Spotted Blotched Woobler. It's a creature that had remained undisturbed in the thick jungle for maybe thousands, or maybe millions of years and it was quite clear why in this untouched wilderness. The colourful beetle had only been officially discovered a matter of weeks before. Our task was to find, follow and film the creature, a task that up until now had never been accomplished.

The morning came and with the guides ahead of us we dragged our heavy equipment through the wiry undergrowth. An undergrowth that would have been impossible to pass without the machetes and jungle knowledge of our guides. The land was so untouched it felt as though a dinosaur could jump out of the undergrowth at any given moment. The guides assured me that no human had ever ventured this deep into the forest. I have to say, I felt rather privileged to be among the first to lay eyes upon it.

For four days we wrestled our aching limbs through the near impenetrable forest only stopping to eat and camp for the night as the wild beasts of the jungle howled around us. Although I had been to many jungles, all around the world, from the wilds of Asia, to the rain forests of South America and the dark reaches of Africa, I never had known a place so wild and savage.

The following morning over the endless calls of the birds and the chirping of insects the group heard a strange sound. A shrill whistle pierced the jungle. Excitedly, the guides called out. That strange song was not that of a bird, it was they were sure, the sound of the very creature we had come to find.



We followed quickly behind as the sound grew louder. All thoughts of tiredness and aching bodies left us as we hurried on. Finally, we reached the thickest thorny thicket. The guides hacked their way through and before another half an hour had past, they returned with beaming smiles upon their faces. They had found what we were looking for.

Quickly we set up our cameras and sound equipment and before long we began recording. The cameras pointed at me as I began:

“And here we have the elusive Lesser Spotted Blotched Woobler. For more than a week we’ve been searching the African jungle for this extremely rare creature. We know relatively nothing of their feeding, sleeping or breeding habits. This large beetle, sits chirping on low lying flowers somewhere near the jungle floor.

“Let’s continue down this trail until we find it. This part, of this near impenetrable jungle has probably never been seen by any human before us.



“Shhh, the songs growing louder, how simply beautiful it is.”

We crept closer as the cameras got some great shots of it. How vibrant and marvellous the creature was, as I stared in astonishment upon it.

“Get closer.” The camera man suggested.

I crept on hands and knees inching ever closer to the insect.

Then we recorded the next part.

“The Lesser Spotted Blotched Woobler is of such rarity that we really know nothing about them. This is quite a special moment.”

With each word I crept ever closer under the watchful gaze of the cameras, filming all the while. Until finally, I was within a few inches of it.

“The song is almost deafening.”



I watched for a second as the beetle scuttled across the leaf and moved closer to me.

It seemed the creature was as curious about me as I was of it. I carried on narrating. “What is happening here?”

As the sound grew ever shriller its mouth opened.

I looked on, in wonder, at the strange scarlet colour that lined the inside of its mouth. It was as if it was displaying its magnificence, as if it wanted the world to see. The mouth opened wider and wider still, until it was like a gaping void in the creature’s head.

The cameras kept rolling.

“And here we see the inside of the enormous mouth. It is likely the scarlet colour inside is to attract prey,” I speculated. “And it gets wider still.”

I crept even closer. “The mouth is incredible, it’s even bigger than creature itself. I feel like a very lucky person to see this. The prey it can take must be huge.

Still the mouth opened further until it was like a scarlet cavern before me.

I crawled a little nearer.

“This beetle must have the biggest mouth of any beetle in the world!” I exclaimed excitedly.

Like a flash it zoomed towards me and then ‘CHOMP!’

