

# Traditional uses of cicadas by Tabare Sine people in Simbu province of Papua New Guinea

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## Abstract

From thousands of insects species living in our lands, cicadas were always special and useful for Tabare Sine people living in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. They serve as food and their sounds help people to recognize the time of the day for various daily activities. Only the useful cicadas have own traditional names.

## Introduction

Tabare Sine, where I live, is an area in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, inhabited by people speaking their own Tabare Sine language. Traditionally, we use to hunt animals in the forest and make gardens planted with sweet potato, greens, sugar cane and bananas (Fig. 1). We live in small villages surrounded by



Fig. 1. Village garden with sweet potato, beans and local greens; author of the article on the right.

Fig. 2. Village house in Tabare Sine



grasslands and rainforests where we make our gardens. Our houses are built from timber (mostly *Casuarina* and *Notophagus*). They have no windows, floor and roof is covered with grass and there is a fireplace in the middle of the house, for heating and cooking (Fig. 2).

From many thousands of insect species living on our lands, cicadas were always special because of their large size and singing. That is why we have special traditional names for many cicada species in our Tabare Sine language. We have always used adult cicadas as food and their singing to mark time of the day and seasons of the year.

## Cicadas as food

There are many different species of cicadas living in the forest; but we use to eat only four of them, which are large and also have a pleasant taste. They are called **Dui helme** (*Cosmopsaltria papuensis* DUFFELS), **Dui erangrre** (*C. aurata* DUFFELS), **Dui meh** or **Dui boh** (*C. mimica* DISTANT) and **Dui wawe** (*C. gigantea gigantea* (DISTANT)). In our language we have a common name, **Dui**, for all cicadas and then a second name for different species. One species, *C. mimica* (Fig. 3), has two traditional names according to when the cicada sings. If this cicada sings in the morning or midday, we call it **Dui meh** but when we hear it in the late afternoon, then we call it **Dui boh**.

Most of the eatable cicadas are collected from various plants around the village and in the gardens. Only **Dui wawe** and **Dui erangrre** are most often found deep in the forest so that we do not collect and eat them, too often. Only the adults of cicadas are collected, then roasted on the red hot charcoal and eaten. They all have the same very pleasant taste and most people come to like them a lot. We favour them as a very delicious meal.

## Cicadas marking time of the day

The sounds of the male cicadas help people to know the time of the day for various daily activities. In the morning, the sound of **Dui erangrre**, **Dui boh** and **Dui wawe** wakes people up so that they know it is time for breakfast and preparing tools to make gardens. The noon



time is marked by the singing of **Dui helme** and **Dui meh**. It is time when the sun is very hot and people use to stop working and rest in the shade. In the late afternoon, when it is time to stop working in the gardens and go back to the village, we can hear the morning cicadas singing again. First we use to hear **Dui boh**, followed by **Dui erangrre** and the last one singing in the evening is **Dui wawe**.

Cicadas are also helping hunters to time their hunting activities in the forest (Fig. 4). When they hear **Dui boh** in the afternoon, they start their preparations for hunting. When **Dui erangrre** sings, the hunters know that cuscus and other forest animals leave their hiding places and start looking for food in the forest. At the time when **Dui wawe** sings, we use to say „noge kobil kemue“ or



Fig. 3.  
**Dui boh**  
(*Cosmopsaltria mimica*)  
has a pleasant taste

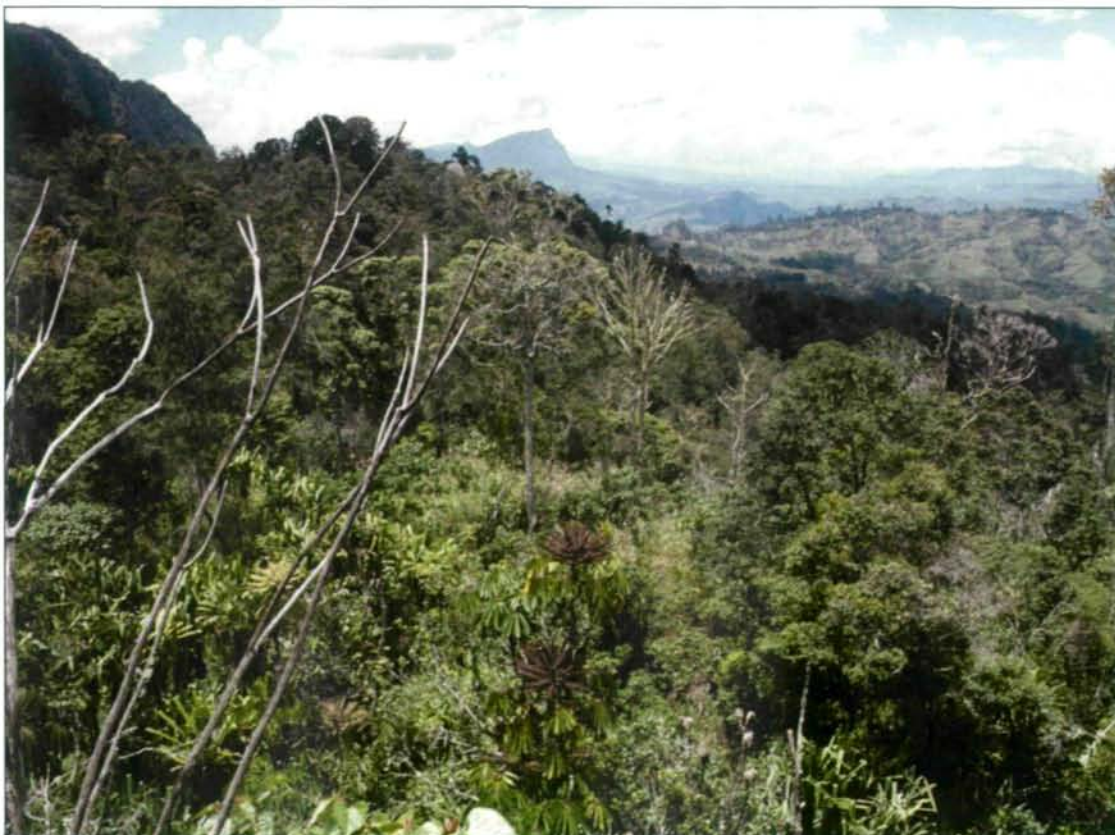


Fig. 4.  
Montane rainforest in  
Tabare Sine  
(Photographs by Milan  
Janda)

„cuscus closed door“. This saying means that the sound made by the cicada is the sound of the door closing behind cuscus when he leaves his house and goes to the forest. At that time, cuscus and other animals are most active and it is the best time to hunt them.

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### **Zusammenfassung**

Zikaden spielen im Leben der Tabare Sine im Hochland von Papua Neuguinea eine besondere Rolle. Vier der größeren Arten werden aufgrund ihres guten Geschmacks gerne gegessen. Zudem bezeichnen die Gesänge der Zikaden verschiedene Tageszeiten und damit traditionell verknüpfte Aktivitäten wie Feldarbeit und Jagd.

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