


Newsletter for Birdwatchers



Vol. 46 No. 3

May - June 2006

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Cover : **Cattle Egret** (*Bubulcus ibis*). This lanky snow white egret with yellow beak is less aquatic than other egrets. It delights in walking briskly behind grazing animals with its neck craned above the shoulders to lunge and jab or snap-up confused grasshoppers and other insects attempting to jump off the grazing animals' path. Photo : S. Shreyas

A Note from the Publisher

Dear fellow Birdwatchers,



Sunbirds' enigmatic ways of life

Purple-rumped sunbird is one of the smallest, captivating and daring of our bird neighbours. These flying jewels flutter about energetically in our flower gardens, in search of nectar and there may be many flowers waiting to quench the sunbirds' appetites. Sunbirds are equipped with long tubular tongue to drain nectar from the flowers of hibiscus, loranthus, lantana, erythrina, salmalia etc. They vivaciously dash half - hover half - among the flowery shrubs and gracefully whirl about as if blown by wind, looking for spiders, weevils, bugs and nectar.

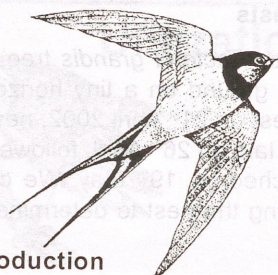
While the male is brilliantly attired in green, purple, chestnut and yellow, the female is by and large dull brown and lacks the radiant costume. But its brilliance has another outlet, for she is one of the most skillful nest builders in the world. Even as the little eye-catching male sings the customary sharp twittering "tityou" or the mousy "sisiswee" song, the inconspicuous female industriously ferries fibres, grass, strips of wafer-thin bark, tendrils, lichens and moss to complete the deep, hanging nest. She dexterously interlaces the nest with spider web and cushions the nest chamber with fine feathery bits and silken materials.

This much general information is known to most birders, but in this issue, we recount a couple of enigmatic episodes hitherto unreported about sunbirds. Drs. Sindu and Vimala Rama Rao's ringside commentary on the intriguing events at the nest of purple-rumped sunbirds on 18th March 2005 is rather weird and difficult to comprehend. Such instances have thus far been reported only from role-reversal birds like the wattled jacana, wherein the females defend their territories against other females and have several males incubating their eggs. Emlens and Demong have in their paper entitled 'Experimental induction of infanticide in female wattled jacanas' published in 1989, in *The Auk* 106: 1-7, reported that when a female jacana takes over a new territory, she kills the young already there, so as to hasten the time when the males will be incubating her own eggs. Likewise, in little button quail (another sex-role reversed species) females have been observed killing chicks in an enclosure in circumstances that suggest they might practise infanticide in nature. Infanticide has been noticed in other role-reversed bird species such as phalaropes, dotterels, and moorhens. But this is the first time I have heard of the female of a normal species committing infanticide.

Another anomalous behaviour has been reported by Harish Bhat, wherein a female purple-rumped sunbird was supposedly found feeding chicks at two adjacent nests. But, I believe with good reason that the sunbird was only exhibiting predator avoidance behaviour to distract an inquisitive predator away from its real nest. On many occasions female purple-rumped sunbirds, have been observed pretending to be aimlessly looking for insects and diving to the nest at an opportune moment.

Thanking you,
Yours in bird conservation,
S. Sridhar, Publisher, NLBW





Introduction

Breeding biology of Crested Tree Swift (*Hemiprocne longipennis*)

SACHIN B. PALKAR, VISHWAS D. KATDARE, ROHAN J. LOVALEKAR and VISHWAS V. JOSHI
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on the same branch with nest. Male left soon after mating.
Female laid eggs after 4-5 days.

24th April 2002

We reached the nesting site at Parshuram at 06.00hrs. Both the male and female were seen perched on a tiny branch of a *Tectona grandis* tree at about 7 meters from the ground. After 5 minutes both birds flew away to another *Tectona grandis* tree, which was five meters away.

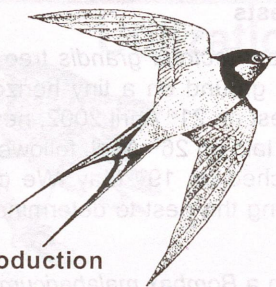
We saw the swift's nest on the second tree. The male was sitting on the nest and the female was sitting close by. Later, the male was seen pulling out a feather from its belly, placing it on the edge of the nest and pasting it with its saliva. After about two minutes the male flew away with loud chirping calls. Immediately thereafter, the female sat on the nest and was seen pasting her saliva and shaping the edge of the nest. It went on for nearly fifteen minutes. Then the female flew away and sat on another tree, five meters away from the nesting tree. No sooner the female perched on that branch the male arrived and mating was accomplished. After mating they flew to another tree and were seen amorously rubbing each other's beaks.

14th April 2004

We reached Parshuram nesting site at 09.30hrs. The nesting pair was noticed on a *Bombax malabaricum* tree. After a few minutes the female flew away. The male remained there and was seen rubbing its beak on the bark. The female arrived after a short while calling and sat close to the male. The female was seen tenderly nudging the male with her head and rubbing her beak against the crown of the male. She was also seen puffing up her feathers, quivering and calling. The male didn't reciprocate her actions. This courtship behaviour went on for about twenty minutes or so. After a while the male flew away and sat on another *Bombax malabaricum* tree, which was 5 meters away. The female followed the male and both the birds were seen rubbing their beaks against each other. The female was seen nudging the male and repeating her courtship maneuvers. After 10 min the pair took to wings with loud calls and sat on the first *Bombax malabaricum* tree. All this went on upto 11.30 hrs, when they flew away. They were not seen for the next two hours.

Nest and Nest construction

Nest is very small, shallow, half cup, fixed bracket-wise to the side of a tiny horizontal branch. Both the birds take part in nest building activities. Nest is 10-12 mm deep in the middle. It is made up of birds' own saliva (Ali & Ripley, 1983). They often use their own feathers and papery bark material for plastering the nest. Nest is very small and well camouflaged with the branch so that it is very difficult to figure out. It simply appears like a natural node or knot of



Breeding biology of Crested Tree Swift (*Hemiprocne longipennis*)

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Introduction

Crested Tree Swift *Hemiprocne longipennis*, is a small beautiful bird found in well-wooded areas and dry forests of the Indian Union. It has bluish grey upper parts and paler under parts, belly and vent becoming whitish in colour. The male has dull orange ear coverts while the female has dark grey ear coverts. Birds have prominent frontal crest, erect while perched, large in size, and pointed tail (Ali & Ripley, 1983).

Study area and method

We studied the breeding biology of this bird in the Western Ghat foothills around Chiplun 17°-31' N. 73°-31' E, Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra state, India. Both places are rich with dry deciduous forests containing *Tectona grandis*, *Acacia catechu*, *Bombax malabaricum*, and *Acacia auriculiformis*. More than 150 species of birds are recorded in this area.

We began our studies in 2002, and 16 nests were located. Nesting activity was recorded from late February to August.

1. In Parshuram (12 kms away from Chiplun) we found the nests on *Tectona grandis* and *Bombax malabaricum* trees. These nests were built at the top of the tree on a tiny branch or on spiny tree like *Bombax malabaricum*. As a result, it is impossible for anyone to climb upto the nests. Therefore, we decided to climb on a tree adjacent to the nesting tree, twice every day, i.e., once in the morning and once in the evening. We used to observe for an hour.
2. Valope (6 kms away from Chiplun) is a small village. It is situated at the foothill and our study area is on the top of the hill. All the nests were found on *Bombax malabaricum* trees, which are on the slanting hillside. For observations we climbed on the top of the hill and observed the nesting activity with a 10 x 50 binocular, as it was easy to observe the nest from eye level.

Observations and discussion

Breeding Season

The breeding season of Crested Tree Swift *Hemiprocne longipennis* is from February to August. During this period the birds are more vocal.

Courtship

The birds were very vocal during courtship. Mating was observed 4 to 5 days prior to the laying of the first egg. Mating was generally noticed on the nesting tree, but not on the same branch with nest. Male left soon after mating. Female laid eggs after 4-5 days.

24th April 2002

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Nest and Nest construction

Nest is very small, shallow, half cup, fixed bracket-wise to the side of a tiny horizontal branch. Both the birds take part in nest building activities. Nest is 10-12 mm deep in the middle. It is made up of birds' own saliva (Ali & Ripley, 1983). They often use their own feathers and papery bark material for plastering the nest. Nest is very small and well camouflaged with the branch so that it is very difficult to figure out. It simply appears like a natural node or knot of

the branch. Nest was entirely filled up by the egg. During the nest building the pair is very vocal. Nest is built at a height 4 to 8 meters above the ground, usually on a leafless tree. In Vindhywasini we found a nest on the dead branch at the top of a *Mangifera indica* tree. The nest building activity is more pronounced in the mornings.

The Crested Tree Swift prefers to nest on *Bombax malabaricum* and *Tectona grandis* trees. Nests were built on the topmost branches of the tree. We studied 16 nests in three years. 10 of them were on *Bombax malabaricum*, four were on *Tectona grandis*, while the fifteenth was on a *Mangifera indica* the sixteenth was on a *Terminalia alata* tree.

Egg

Egg is a singleton, white coloured, which is very elongated oval in shape; obtuse at both the ends. Average size of 29 eggs given by Baker is as 23.7 x 17.1mm (Ali & Ripley, 1983).

Incubation and Hatching

Incubation starts immediately after laying. Both the male and the female incubate the egg. But female takes the major share of incubation. Only female incubates during the night. During incubation the pair keeps calling and communicating with each other. During low temperatures the incubating bird covers the entire nest by puffing up its belly feathers; especially during early mornings and late evenings. The egg is not exposed during such period. However, during high temperature (between 11.00 hrs and 14.00hrs) the incubating bird merely shelters the egg; standing on the branch. There will be a gap in between abdomen of the incubating bird and the egg which remains exposed during this period and easily observable.

We observed the incubation process for the entire day at nest number two on 28th April 2002. We started our observations from 06.00hrs in the morning up to 18.50hrs in the evening. In our observations of 12 hrs 30 minutes (750 minutes) the male was at the nest for 222 minutes (29.7%). Female was at the nest for 460minutes (61.3%). The nest remained unattended for 68minutes (9%). Incubation period was found to be 23 to 25 days.

Nestling and nestling period

Eggs usually hatched any time between 23rd and 26th day. The chick is ashy grey in colour with black spots on the feathers and sits staidly with its bill pointing upward. It is fully camouflaged with the branch and resembles a broken stem of the branch. Both the parents feed the chick. They often shelter the chick.

We could not record the exact fledging period, but it should be around 24 days.

Second brood

We observed the second brood in the same nest. After leaving the nest; the chick from the first brood is seen flying or resting with the parents near the nest. The chick of the first brood was seen sitting next to the incubating parent and accepting food. Ours is the first record of observing the brood succession among crested tree swifts.

Progress in the observed nests

NEST No. 1 : The nest was on *Tectona grandis* tree at a height of 5 meters above the ground on a tiny horizontal branch. When we found the nest on 21st April 2002, nesting was in progress. The egg was laid on 26th April, followed by incubation and the chick hatched on 19th May. We could not observe the fledgling leaving the nest to determine the fledging period.

NEST No. 2 : This nest was on a *Bombax malabaricum* tree at a height of 5 meters from the ground. When we found the nest on 14th April 2002, nest building was in progress. On 23rd April the egg was laid and it hatched on 18th May. After that we could observe the progress for about 15 days only.

NEST No 3 : This nest was found on 10th February 2003 on a *Bombax malabaricum* tree at a height of 6 meters from the ground. After four days i.e. on 14th February, the singleton egg was laid. This egg hatched on 13th March. We could not record exact date of fledging of chick. A second brood was observed on 10th May. The fledgling of the first brood was seen near the nest.

NEST No 4 : The nest was found on 24th February 2003 on a *Bombax malabaricum* tree at a height of 5 meters from the ground. After 13 days, i.e. 09th March, the egg was laid. The egg hatched on 04th April. After eight days the chick was predated by an unknown predator.

NEST No 5 : The nest was found on 12th March 2003 on a *Bombax malabaricum* tree at a height of 5 meters from the ground. On 22nd March the egg was laid which hatched on 17th April. Here also the second brood was raised but we could not get the details. Often the fledgling of the first brood sat near its parents, which were busy in incubation. We watched the parents feeding this chick, even as they incubated the egg of the second brood.

Breeding success

The percentage of breeding success was found to be about 68.75%. Only 5 of 16 nests failed. (See table)

Year	Successful	Unsuccessful	Total	Percentage
2002	4	1	5	80%
2003	5	1	6	84%
2004	2	3	5	40%
Total	11	5	16	68.75%

Conclusions

Incubation period of Crested Tree Swift *Hemiprocne longipennis* is presented for the first time. Both the parents participated in nest building, incubation, feeding and guarding. Incubation period is 23 to 25 days. Fledging period is around 24 days. Brood succession has been recorded for the first time. Breeding success was found to be 68.75%.

References

- Ali Salim and Ripley S. Dillon, (1983). Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi. Volume No. 4
- Ali Salim, (1996). Book of Indian Birds

Utilization of artificial nest boxes by Common Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) in Cauvery Delta, Tamil Nadu



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Barn owls are ubiquitous in distribution; primarily inhabit man-made structures; hunt rodents and shrews in and around agricultural fields, human habitations and groves. Nests of barn owls are usually placed on bare ground, in the gaps or crevices at the rear of the statues of deities installed around the sanctum sanctorum and vehicles (vahanams) of different gods in places of worship. Occasionally they are found nesting in the cavities inside temple towers, dilapidated structures, unused and desolate rooms overgrown with vegetation. By tradition they prefer to nest in barns and natural cavities of large trees, but of late they have been found nesting in numerous strange places mentioned above, mainly due to non-availability of suitable and safe nesting places. Therefore, provision of artificial nest boxes could be helpful for the conservation and propagation of barn owls, wherever suitable nest sites are scarce or absolutely lacking.

Studies in Malaysia have indicated that the provision of artificial nest boxes has increased the breeding density of barn owls. The objective of the present study was to monitor and compare the utilization of nest boxes by barn owls in three different habitats viz., human habitations, trees in groves and trees near agricultural lands and to suggest the barn owls' preference of sites for nesting. Such a study will be central to drawing up a comprehensive conservation plan for barn owls, through large scale installation of nest boxes in future.

The study area (35 km²); intensively engaged in agricultural operations, was at the tail end of Cauvery delta of Nagapattinam district, Tamilnadu. The crops cultivated are rice, pulses, cotton, groundnut, sugarcane, coconut palm and oil palm. Nest boxes (Fig) for barn owls were prepared using wooden planks of *Samanea saman*. Forty nest boxes were installed in the months of July 1993, October 1993 and December 1993 in the places wherever dearth of natural nesting sites were observed. Some nest boxes were placed at other suitable man-made structures and on trees (*Mangifera indica*, *Tamarindus indica*, *Azadirachta indica* and *Samanea saman*) near to human habitations (n = 25), in the trees (*Tamarindus indica*) of groves (n = 5), and in the trees (*Tamarindus indica* and *Delonix regia*) near to agricultural lands (n = 10). The height of the installed nest boxes ranged between 3 and 10 m above ground level.

The nest boxes were monitored once a month between September 1993 and January 1995, for estimating the quotient of utilization by barn owls. Nest box utilization by barn owls was confirmed either by direct observation of the

adults entering or leaving the nest box or the presence of eggs or chicks inside the nest box, or by noticing the tell-tale signs viz., pellets, droppings, regurgitates and remnants of prey below the nest box. Two way ANOVA was performed to find the differences in the utilization of nest boxes by barn owl among the habitats.

The mean percentage of utilization of barn owl was found to be high in the boxes installed near to human habitations (45.2%) followed by agricultural lands (41.8%) and groves (16.3%) (Table). A significant difference was observed in the utilization of nest boxes by barn owls among the habitats (Two way ANOVA). Barn owls used maximum number of boxes during December 1994 (80%), October and November 1993 (66.7%) and November 1993 (61.5%) which were near to human habitations, groves and agricultural lands, respectively. The overall mean nest box utilization by barn owl for nesting and roosting was 40.9% during the study period (Table). From the results it is evident, that the barn owls are closely associated with man and agriculture.

Out of the forty nest boxes, five were installed near to the sites having a dearth of nesting sites and they were immediately occupied by barn owls for nesting. The dearth and non-availability of safe and suitable nesting sites would apparently act as a limiting factor for the breeding cycle of barn owls. The provision of artificial nest boxes helped the barn owls appreciably in maintaining the density of breeding pairs. Nest boxes may also be utilized by the barn owls for roosting during adverse climates, since they provide a sheltered safe microenvironment.

The acceptance of artificial nest boxes installed on man-made structures and trees by barn owls indicate that they use the boxes as substitutes for the losses of natural nesting sites. Our study has revealed that the reproductive output of barn owls improved significantly whenever nesting opportunities were provided through installation of nest boxes, compared to those at sites having a paucity of suitable nesting sites.

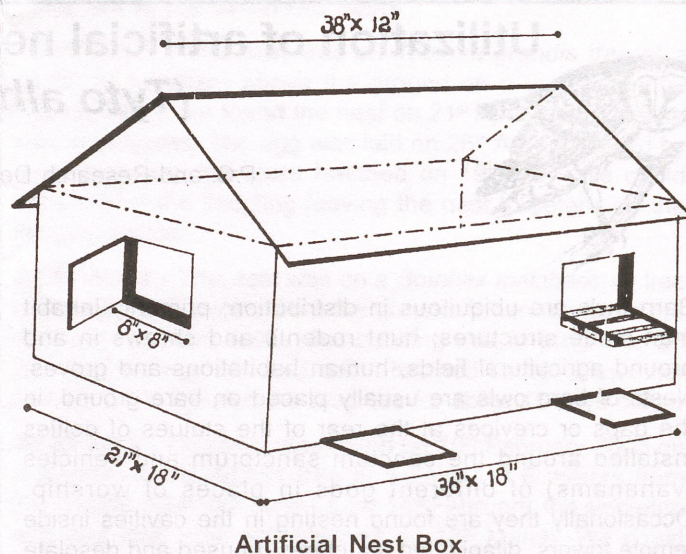
Besides Barn Owls, Spotted owlets (*Athene brama*), Blue-rock pigeons (*Columba livia*) and Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) occupied the artificial nest boxes to the tune of 6.3% (overall mean) in all the three habitats. Provision of smaller nest boxes for other birds could reduce the competition from other birds for the boxes installed exclusively for the barn owls.

Thus, it is suggested that the provision of nest boxes for barn owls on man-made structures and trees near to

MONTH & YEAR	Percentage of nest box utilization for nesting and roosting*				
	Habitat types				
	Human Habitation	Groves	Agricultural Lands	Barn owl	Other Birds**
September '93	30.8	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0
October '93	28.5	66.7	38.5	36.7	0.0
November '93	50.0	66.7	61.5	56.7	0.0
December '93	30.7	33.3	50.0	35.0	0.0
January '94	28.0	20.0	30.0	27.5	0.0
February '94	60.0	40.0	50.0	55.0	0.0
March '94	44.0	0.0	30.0	35.0	12.5
April '94	36.0	0.0	30.0	30.0	20.0
May '94	40.0	0.0	40.0	35.0	17.5
June '94	36.0	0.0	40.0	32.5	17.5
July '94	32.0	0.0	50.0	32.5	5.0
August '94	36.0	0.0	60.0	37.5	5.0
September '94	60.0	0.0	30.0	45.0	10.0
October '94	52.0	20.0	40.0	45.0	0.0
November '94	48.0	10.0	40.0	42.5	2.5
December '94	80.0	0.0	60.0	65.0	7.5
January '95	76.0	20.0	60.0	65.0	10.0
Mean	45.2	16.3	41.8	40.9	6.3

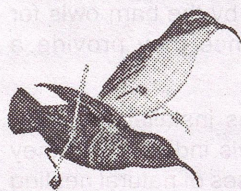
* The period between September '93 and December '93 there were 20 nest boxes (13 in Human habitation; 3 in Groves and 4 in Agricultural lands) for Barn owls and thereafter there were 40 nest boxes (25 in Human habitation; 5 in Groves and 10 near to Agricultural lands) in the study area.

** Other birds included Spotted owl, Blue-rock Pigeon and Common Myna



Artificial Nest Box

agricultural fields, where the prey population is abundant, would be a feasible strategy for the conservation of barn owls. By doing so, farmers can effectively keep rodent populations under check. In the long run, crop losses due to rodents can be minimized and there will also be significant savings on rodenticides and the associated hazards. Further, the spread of contagious diseases through rodent contact can also be tackled to some extent by this simple bio-control measure. Therefore every effort should be made by bird lovers to encourage farmers to install artificial barn owl nest boxes in suitable locations in and around their fields and protect the owls, so as to derive perpetual dividends from them and their progeny.



The sunbirds are of the family *Nectariniidae* [Ali, S & S.D. Ripley, 1987]. Three sunbird species occur on the plains of TamilNadu: *Nectarinia zeylonica* Linnaeus, [1766]; *N. asiatica* Latham, 1790; and *N. lotenia* [Linnaeus, 1766]. These compete with one another, the requirements are almost the same. The Loten's sunbird is endemic to the Indian Peninsula including Sri Lanka. It occurs in Tiruchirappalli - 10.8 N 78.7 E. At Tambaram a pair had been observed to build a nest and reuse it for four successive broods [Gift Siromoney, 1977]. The author, however, does not give details of the dates and times of the events such as nest initiation and completion, clutch initiation and completion and incubation and nestling periods. The Reproductive refractory period [Rrp] is not known for the birds. That for the Purple-rumped Sunbird being known, and

Breeding Strategy of a Sunbird at Tambaram - TamilNadu - a Critique

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both Purple-rumped and the Loten's being congeneric displaying similarity in the several elements of the breeding process, the data for the former are assumed to be about the same for the latter and vice versa. Nevertheless, Rrp is extensible depending on the external environmental factors, with a minimum of 25 days and a maximum of 48 days [Wesley, 2003].

Critique

The data [vide appendix] of Gift Siromoney (1977) are presented on Table. His assertion that a single nest was repeatedly used by a pair of Loten's Sunbirds for four broods is given a scrutiny in this account, in the light of the reported observations [Wesley, 2003] on the Loten's Sunbird and the Purple-rumped Sunbird.

Table of deductions[†] from the statements* of Gift Siromoney, 1977

Serial Brood No.	1			2		3	4
	* Statement † Deduction	Nesting/ Renovation	Pre-laying 2-day gap	Egg laying dates	Incubation Period and *Hatching day	Nestling Period and †Fledging day	Remarks
1	*	1 st Week of July 1976			Roosting in nest 2 nd week of July 1976	After some days parents fed chicks, Later, empty nest	Data very vague. "Roosting" is wrongly used for incubation
	†	1-6 th July 1976	7 th & 8 th	9 th & 10 th	10 th - 25 th	25 th July - 9 th August	
	or						
	†	Last Week of June to 1 st July 1976	1 st & 2 nd	3 rd & 4 th	4 th - 19 th	July 19 th - 3 rd August	
2	*				1 st Week of September, 1976 Parents fed young	Nest empty at the end of 1 st week of September, 1976	R & P - closed
	†	1 - 4 th August	5 th & 6 th	7 th & 8 th	8 - 23 rd August	23 rd August - 7 th September	
	or						
	†	3 - 5 th August	6 th - 7 th	8 th - 9 th	9 th - 24 th August	24 th August - 8 th September	R & P - 8 - 11 days
3	*	3 rd Week of Sept. 1976 Birds visited nest for 4 days			28 th Sept. 1976, Female roosting, 2 - eggs. Later, fed young.	24 th October, One young feel out, Parents fed this, & the other in the nest	
	†	16 th - 20 th Sept.	21 st - 22 nd	23 rd - 24 th	24 th Sept. - 9 th October	9 th - 24 th October	
	or						
	†	18 th - 22 nd Sept.	23 rd & 24 th	25 th & 26 th	26 th Sept. - 11 th October	11 th - 26 th October	R & P - 32 - 34 days
4	*	27 th November, 1976, Birds visited nest, Mate in the air, Female Rebuilt Nest			10 th December, 1976. Female Roosted, 2 Eggs	6 th January, 1977, Nest had fallen, a chick on Floor, the other in the scrub being fed.	
	†	27 th Nov. - 3 rd December, 1976	4 th & 5 th	6 th & 7 th	7 th - 22 nd December	22 nd Dec. - 6 th Jan. 1977	
	or						
	†	27 th Nov. - 5 th Dec.	6 th & 7 th	8 th & 9 th	9 th Dec - 24 th Dec.	24 th Dec - 8 th Jan. 1977	R & P - a few days
5	*	Second Week of January 1977. Two birds looked over the remnant nest. No nest.					



* Actual data of Gift Siromoney's article, 1977. † Assumed possible alternate data

About the Table

The table has first column numbered 1-5 and corresponding five rows. Each of the latter is divided into two major rows. The top row, in each, states the data of Mr. Gift Siromoney, the author of 1977 article. Designated as "Statements", symbolized by asterisk "*" and the lower is row designated as "Deductions" symbolized by dagger sign "†". Under "Deductions" two possible alternate data are suggested by me and hence there are two sub-rows for the second of each row. The sub-rows are separated by "Or" in the Table.

The deductions are based on the understanding that the history of brood involves nest building (4-5), egg laying (2), incubation and hatching (15), fledging (15), each occupying a certain number of days, (in brackets), peculiar to the species involved, and the interval (Rrp) between one brood fledging and the starting of another varying between 25 and 48 days depending on the environmental situation.

If the 1st July 1976 [Table] is assumed to have been the day of nest initiation, the first brood must have fledged on /

about 9th August. And, if the pair had brought up the second brood as envisaged by the author, the brood fledging in the first week of September, the nest initiation ought to have been in the early first week of August. This, however, would not have been possible, the Rrp being solid and closed. Hence, the second brood in the nest was that of another pair of sunbirds.

Ousted from the territory, the first pair might have gone in search of another nest, or resorted to making a fresh one somewhere else in the habitat.

The second brood fledged in the first week of September, as the adult would not have been physiologically prepared for another set, 3rd set of eggs, that had to hatch in about the 3rd week of the same month; the Rrp was only 9-11 days.

So the third brood was that of either the first pair, if it had not settled elsewhere, or of a third pair of birds. Strange, if the already vanquished pair regained the site. The third brood had not fledged on 24th October when one of the nestlings had fallen out, but hopped to the safety of the scrub jungle. Perhaps, they would have fledged naturally in another couple of days, say, on 26th October.

The third pair of adults had had more than the normal minimum Rrp [32-34 days] to have been able to produce the fourth brood in the nest. Hence this pair had, it may be assumed, two broods in the same nest. Then, there was another possibility. If an earlier pair had been around, that might have had the chance of reoccupying the nest after a tussle. On 27th November '76 the birds visited the nest and "mated in the air". If this meeting in the air and claw-locked landing was really mating is a moot point. In this species, as in the Purple Sunbird, *N. asiatica*, the male begins breeding activities even while in the eclipse plumage, contending with the fully moulted males in Tiruchirappalli [Pers:unpub.] and elsewhere [Wesley, 1999]. The nest wrested from the earlier occupant, the female of the new pair would have authored the fourth brood, though this need not have been the case in the present instance. In the final analysis, there were at least three pairs of sunbirds involved in the making of four successful clutches / broods.

In the second week of January '77 two birds "looked over" the nest but no nest was built. The fourth brood having 'fledged' at the end of the 1st week of January 77, the return to the nest site again of the parents for another brood to be raised in it is inconceivable. The last pair might have been looking for the young that had been lost somehow, or it was a fourth pair on their search for a nest site, the thorny structure still in place in the verandah.

That the nest had snapped indicated its strength and durability; it could support only four broods, the last one though precariously. Also, the renovation work said to have been done by the bird might not have been at the anchoring region but within the bulbous portion for cushioning the bed. Apparently, the species in general does not have the neural/cerebral mechanism to make do the nest from an intermediate step in the construction process.

The Crimson Sunbird is reported to be able to make a new nest in the event of nest-death, and, normally, to raise more than one brood in the same nest [Lovalekar, R.J & S.B. Palkar, 2006].

All considered, what appeared to have been a repeated use of a nest by a pair of Loten's Sunbirds at Tambaram was a jumble of serial usurpation and piracy by different pairs of the bird species searching at random for new sites, and successful reuse, though not successively, of the same nest, the bird retaining at the same time its primary ability to make new nests when required. If there is cross-specific piracy, *i.e.*, the Loten's sunbird wresting nests of other sunbird species, is a suspicion arising out of an instance at Tiruchirappalli of a pair investigating a Purple-rumped Sunbird's nest.

The three congeneric species of sunbirds are resident birds on the Madras Christian College campus (Selvarathinam *et al*, 1993). On the above inference it seems certain that the aggressive candidate that the Loten's Sunbird is has steadily progressed from being an occasional and rare visitor to the M.C.C. Campus in Barne's days [1938] to its current abundance there reported about by Santharam [1999]. Could the absence of the Purple Sunbird at Vandalur [Manimozhi *et al*, 1995] be attributed to this aggressive congener? If so, either case is an instance of competitive exclusion, a strategy prevalent among the varied animal kinds.

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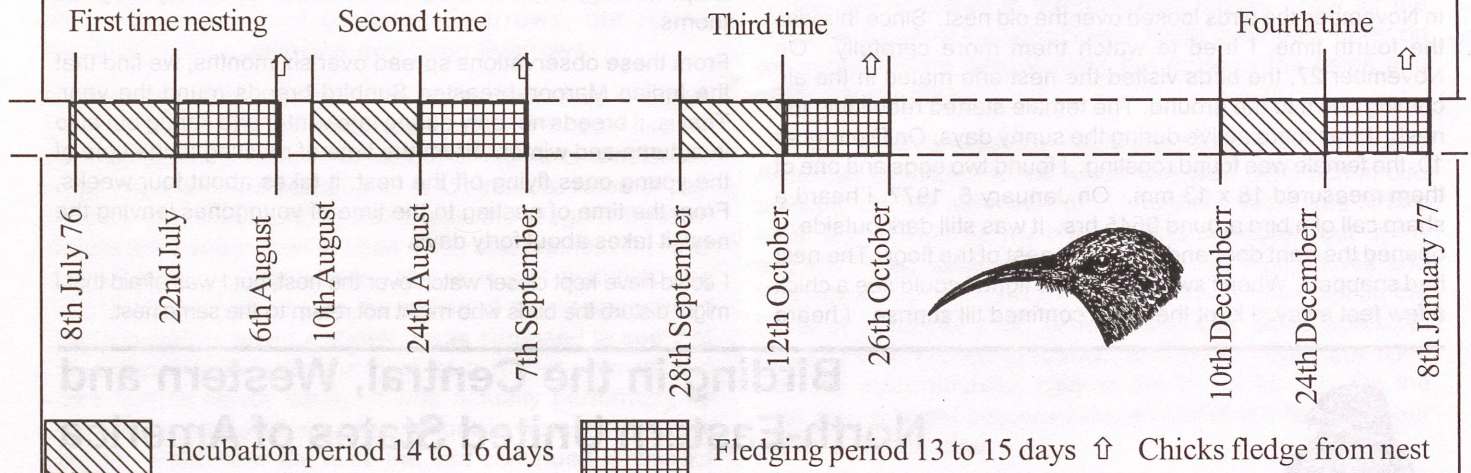
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An analysis of Gift Shiromoney's article

(NLBW (17 (9): 8-9, 1977) (reproduced as Appendix below)

Calendar of events as construed from Gift Shiromoney's article (July 1976 - January 1977)

(Scale :10 days = 1 Cm = )



I have examined Shiromoney's article and prepared this calendar. I am of the opinion that the first time and second time nesting are probably that of the same pair. Nevertheless, Dr. Wesley feels that the second time nesting was that of another pair, since the egg(s) needs to develop from the follicle, mature and descend the duct(s) etc., which might require more time. Dr. Wesley also emphasizes the fact that the parents have to take care of the fledglings of the previous brood to independence. All the same, I believe, it might have been difficult for another male to take over the territory, attract a female and initiate nesting activity in such a short span. Regarding the question of taking care of the fledglings of the previous brood to independence, it should be remembered that among the Maroon-breasted sunbirds, the young out of nest are fed mostly by male (Salim Ali and Ripley), so that the female can concentrate entirely on the second brood.

Given that the nest was at a height of three meters from the ground, it was not easy for any observer to frequently clamber up to the pouch shaped nest, push aside the protruding porch above the nest entrance and peep inside, to ascertain the exact stages of incubation, hatching and growth of nestlings. Consequently, the interval between the first and second nesting has shortened noticeably in Shiromoney's article, which has become the focal point of Dr. Wesley's critique. It might be of interest to readers to note that Phillips had recorded that the Ceylon Maroon-breasted Sunbird (*Nectarinia lotenia lotenia*) may use the same nest for several successive broods in his four part paper "Nests and eggs of Ceylon birds", in Ceylon Journal of Science, published between 1939 and 44.

— S. Sridhar
 Publisher, NLBW

Appendix

Repeated use of a single nest by the Indian Maroon-breasted Sunbird by Gift Siromoney published in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers, [17 (9):8-9] August 1977

During a period of six months from July 1976 to January 1977, a single nest was used four times by Indian Maroon-breasted Sunbirds. It is quite likely that the same pair used the nest repeatedly. In the Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan, it is noted that in Ceylon, the same nest may be used by the Ceylon Maroon-breasted Sunbird (*Nectarinia lotenia lotenia*), but no such record exists for the Indian subspecies (*Nectarinia lotenia hindustanica*) which is often referred to as Loten's Sunbird. This Sunbird can be easily distinguished from the Purple Sunbird by its larger size and longer beak.

During the first week of July (1976), I noticed a female Indian Maroon-breasted Sunbird building a nest in our verandah. I had fixed some dry thorny branches (Soorai mullu) of *Ziziphus*

oenopia on the ceiling to keep the bats off during nights. The bird suspended its nest from a twig at a height of about three meters from the floor. During the second week of July, the female roosted in the nest at night. After some days, both the male and the female used to feed the chick/s in the nest. Later I found the nest empty and the chick/s had presumably flown away.

After a few weeks, the same nest was used for the second time by the Sunbirds. During the first week of September, both the male and the female were found feeding a single chick. It is quite possible that it was the same pair of parent birds. The nest was empty at the end of the first week of that month.

During the third week of September, a pair visited the nest once again and for four days the female would enter and look around the nest. On September 28, the female was seen roosting at night. It was easy to see the long beak of the female sticking out of the nest. We used to keep the verandah light burning till about 10 p.m., and this did not seem to affect the bird in the

least. Two eggs were in the nest and later, the female was found feeding the chicks. On October 24, one young chick fell out of the nest and I put it back in the nest. It fell off again and hopped around and got into the scrub jungle surrounding our house. The female kept feeding it. The parents also fed the second chick in the nest.

In November, the birds looked over the old nest. Since this was the fourth time, I tried to watch them more carefully. On November 27, the birds visited the nest and mated in the air, coming down to the ground. The female started rebuilding the nest. It was more active during the sunny days. On December 10, the female was found roosting. I found two eggs and one of them measured 18 x 13 mm. On January 6, 1977, I heard a sharp call of a bird around 0545 hrs. It was still dark outside. I opened the front door and found the nest of the floor. The nest had snapped. When I switched on the light, I could see a chick a few feet away. I kept the chick confined till sunrise. I heard

the parent birds but they did not come to feed the chick nor did they look for the nest. I restored the chick to the birds, which were busy looking after another chick in the scrub jungle.

During the second week of January, two birds looked over what was left of the nest. They did not build another nest from the *Ziziphus* twig; and I cleared the verandah of the dry *Ziziphus* thorns.

From these observations spread over six months, we find that the Indian Maroon-breasted Sunbird breeds round the year. That is, it breeds not only during late winter and spring but also in autumn and winter. From the time of roosting to the time of the young ones flying off the nest, it takes about four weeks. From the time of nesting to the time of youngones leaving the nest, it takes about forty days.

I could have kept closer watch over the nest, but I was afraid that I might disturb the birds who might not return to the same nest.



My long cherished dream came true when I was offered a short-term summer internship at High Point Primate Communication Research Facility in Missouri, USA, under the Project Bow, a three-year old male chimpanzee. During the internship period and related travel sessions to Northeast and Western States, I had ample opportunities to watch the bird diversity of these regions. There are over 800 species of birds in North America (Richard, 2004). In Missouri alone, more than 400 different kinds of birds have been recorded through the years (Tekiel, 2001). During my birding in these regions I was able to record more than 50 species of birds.

The first bird I sighted was a pair of our familiar House sparrows at John F. Kennedy airport lounge, New York. En route from St. Louis to High Point Drive, I was overwhelmed by the natural beauty of Missouri State. Missouri, having open space of more than 69,000 sq. miles is divided into three distinct regions, viz, the glaciated plains (Central Low Lands), the Southern Missouri (Upland Ozarks) and South East Missouri, each of which supports different group of birds. The Green Ozark Mountains with dense forests sidelined the highways followed by creeks and caves which are famous tourist attractions. During our three hour drive, we stopped at one of the food outlets where I saw a flock of European Starlings on the ground feeding on leftovers. When I reached the High-Point Facility, the first bird I saw was an American Robin foraging for worms on the ground. I found the place much cleaner and greener with sprawling lawns dotted with trees such as apple, poplars, red maple, silver maple, pine oaks and hickory, harboring a significant number

Birding in the Central, Western and North-Eastern United States of America

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of birds. After Robins, the most sighted birds were the Chipping Sparrows and the vibrant Eastern Bluebird which happens to be the State Bird of Missouri. Around the place hardly any garbage was noticed and littering was negligible. This perhaps explains the fact that American Crows were mostly encountered in woods and meadows only. Since most of the natives maintain bird feeds and birdbaths which attract small birds like Black-capped Chickadees and Sparrows.

During the month of June the temperature ranged between 26°C and 28°C with sunny and warm mornings and noon followed by pleasant shadowy evenings due to oak, hickory and pine trees. Most birds were sighted in the evenings till sunset.

I was lucky to spot a Bald Eagle, the national bird of USA, flying overhead at noon with its distinct bright white head and tail plumage, through which it can be distinguished from vultures in flight. The Turkey Vulture which is very common in that region was frequently seen hovering with its distinct red head and two-toned wings with black leading edge and gray on the trailing edge and tip. Besides these birds of prey, I also recorded Black Vultures, Ospreys and a Sharp-shinned Hawk perching on the stub of an old tree.

The 200- acre Netz Farm at Toad Branch Drive also harbored a good number of birds. Once while returning from there, I saw some light blue coloured birds hopping amid the bushes. They were later identified as Indigo Buntings. Looking from my vehicle, I was overjoyed to see 6 to 8 female Wild Turkeys in the middle of the road. Seeing our car they quickly headed towards the woods.

One evening I heard a *twit-twit* sound just over my head on a maple tree. I looked up and noticed a bright red bird making the call. It was the Northern Cardinal. It differed from another red bird, the Summer Tanager and the Scarlet Tanagers, having a black mask or crest on head. They are usually reported from the hedgerows. Among the sparrows, there were mixed flocks of Chipping Sparrows, the Harris Sparrows, House Sparrows and Song Sparrows.

During most of the sunsets I was fascinated by a small, delicate grayish brown bird, the Eastern Phoebe usually perched on old branch or on wires, giving its characteristic song "*Fee Bee*" and hawking to catch insects. Another pair of birds with this hawking habit was the elegant Eastern Kingbirds most common in open fields and prairies. On Netz farm, during my second trip, as I was just watching the Barn Swallows perching on the ceiling of an old abandoned barn, I suddenly heard a shriek. I was surprised to see that I was about to step on the nest of a Killdeer, an upland shore bird of plover family. It was actually performing its broken wing display to divert my attention from the nest. As long as I stood near the nest, the bird continued to distract me with its broken wing display. But no sooner I changed my direction away from the nest, the killdeer flew off chattering. Frequently at the approaching of darkness, I was struck of by the twittering calls of the Chimney Swifts flying in hundreds towards their roosting sites. These birds were often called as 'flying cigars' due to their pointed body shape.

One evening during my stroll in the woods I heard the *tap-tap* in the upper canopy of oak-hickory trees. A look through my binoculars revealed a Red-capped or Red-headed Woodpecker excavating a hole in the bark of an oak tree, unaware of my prying eyes. The other species of woodpeckers sighted were the Red-bellied Woodpecker and the Downy Woodpecker which was reported in the birch-sycamore forest in Cannan. On the fine morning of 28th June, as I lifted the blinds of my window I was surprised to see a pair of Northern Bobwhite Quails standing in the tall dry grass near the fence. As it rained heavily in the night the pair was enjoying the sunshine. The male bobwhite suddenly sensed my presence and swiftly ran in the dense grass followed by the female. Nevertheless, it was a good sighting. Again on 28th of June, in the morning we took our chimp to Montauk Nature Trail. There on the way I again saw a Bobwhite pair along with a Common Grackle with its iridescent blue head and glossy black body.

In the afternoons, I frequently heard the cooing calls of the mourning doves, perched on the wooden fence and preening their bodies, between the cooing calls.

On 19th July, we started for our New Hampshire odyssey in the northeast region of US. During the trip we crossed several states like Ohio, Indiana, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania et., Indiana is known as the bread basket of the USA with plenty of corn and wheat fields. Looking out during the drive, I saw a Cattle Egret along with some American Crows in the fields. When we halted at one of the rest areas, I spotted house sparrows and a Yellow-headed

Blackbird with brilliant yellow head and nape of the neck, accepting tidbits and other eatables from the visitors. At the next rest area in Cleveland, Ohio, I spotted a Red-winged Blackbird. At a little distance some people were gleefully feeding a flock of Rock Doves or Rock pigeons.

As we moved closer to the northeast region, I saw for the first time a pair of Canada Geese flying overhead. Later on we spotted more geese along the route in the fields and other urban areas.

Our log cabin in Cannan was surrounded by birch and American sycamore forest which was also quite rich in bird species. On the afternoon of 2nd August I heard lots of bird calls. As I picked up my binoculars and peeked out of my window I saw quite a few Red-breasted Nuthatches and White-breasted Nuthatches climbing down head first on the trunk of a conifer tree, Chickadees and Song Sparrows hopping from branch to branch, and entire forest was filled with the liquid flute-like calls of the Wood Thrush. On the next day, a bright yellow American Goldfinch flew past our car to a nearby tree.

In the evening I used to enjoy watching the diving acrobatics of Common Loons in the lake and after dark we could hear their coyote like calls from the lake. While watching them from my beach chairs, I was startled by the machine gun like clattering calls of a Belted Kingfisher, which flew over my head; probably it was building a nest on the bank of the lake as I sighted this bird near the same place, quite often.

Since my sojourn in the West was in San Francisco bay region, I had the opportunity of watching marine birds of the Pacific, like Ring-billed Gulls that were friendly with the tourists up to the extreme habit of grabbing the food from the hands. Then flying above the ocean were the Great Black-backed Gulls and the Brown Pelicans. Near the beach while I was leisurely munching my sandwich, I saw a fluffy Crowned Sparrow looking at me expectantly for a tidbit. There were flocks of Starlings and Brown-headed Cowbirds, annoying the tourists and creating a nuisance. There were "Do not feed Birds" sign boards everywhere and therefore I did not offer any morsel to the birds.

Once back at the high point facility, I saw a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird hovering to sip nectar from a flower. At first glance I mistook it for a moth. Frequently in early mornings, I spotted a pair of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers perched on the electric wires, flaunting their distinct long tail.

During my stay in United States and at birding trips, I also encountered a few North-American mammals like the White-tailed Deer, Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, White-tailed Jack Rabbit, Eastern gray Squirrel, Eastern Fox Squirrel, wood chuck or Ground Hog and Nine-banded Armadillo. A number of road kills were also noticed scattered along the highways. The carcasses included those of raccoons, badger, ground-hogs rats, rabbits, and possums.

There is wide scope for exploring the bird and animal life of these regions of America. I am thankful to Dr. Aya katz for

providing me local hospitality and a good opportunity for bird watching and I am very grateful to Prof. H. S. A. Yahya for improving this Proof. Finally, I am grateful to my family for sponsoring my visit to USA and to my brother Haris who arranged the visit to California.

Appendix -1 Scientific name of the birds sighted:

Common Name	Scientific Name
1. House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
2. American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>
3. Summer Tanager	<i>Piranga rubra</i>
4. Gray Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>
5. Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>
6. Black-Capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapilla</i>
7. Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>
8. American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>
9. Great-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>
10. Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>
11. Purple Martin	<i>progne subis</i>
12. Harris Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia querula</i>
13. European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
14. Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>
15. Northern Bobwhite Quail	<i>Colinus virginianus</i>
16. Common Grackle	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>
17. Eastern Bluebird	<i>Sialia sialis</i>
18. Indigo Bunting	<i>Passerina cyanea</i>
19. Red headed Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>
20. Brown Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>
21. Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferous</i>
22. Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
23. Dark eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>
24. Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>
25. Chimney Swift	<i>Chaetura pelagica</i>
26. Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
27. Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>



28. Yellow-headed Blackbird	<i>xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>
29. Red Winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>
30. Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
31. Ring billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>
32. Sharp-Shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>
33. Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>
34. American Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis tristis</i>
35. Wood Thrush	<i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>
36. Red Breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>
37. White Breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>
38. Downy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides pubescens</i>
39. Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
40. Belted Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>
41. Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>
42. Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>
43. Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
44. Great Black backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
45. White Crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>
46. Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>
47. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	<i>Tyrannus forficatus</i>
48. Common Yellow throat Warbler	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
49. Eastern Phoebe	<i>Sayornis phoebe</i>
50. Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>
51. Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>
52. Osprey	<i>Pandio haliaetus</i>
53. Ruby throated Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus colubris</i>

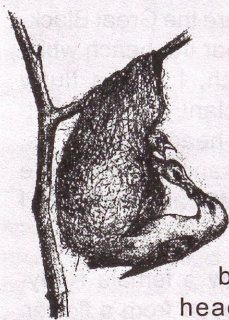


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Notes on the nesting of Purple-rumped Sunbirds in our garden

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We have had sunbirds nesting in our garden from many years. There have been instances of White-eyes, White-headed babblers and Spotted doves successfully raising their offspring. We have maintained a systematic account only from 1999. Given below are the sunbirds' nesting data, as extracted from my (VRR) diaries.

13-1-1999. Spotted a pair of Purple-rumped Sunbird prospecting for a nesting site in the 12 feet tall red Hibiscus shrub. The female started building the nest with fluff, hair, dried leaves and Tecoma seeds. The nesting was successful.

4-1-2000. Sunbirds nested in the red Hibiscus shrub and successfully raised two chicks.

19-3-2000. Sunbirds built a nest in a tangle of Jasmine. The nesting was successful.

18-7-2000. Sunbirds nested in Mehendi plant canopy

3-6-2000. Female sunbird was incubating the eggs. The nesting was successful.

4-1-2001. Female sunbird was incubating her eggs in the last year's nest in the Mehendi plant canopy which she had refurbished and occupied.

18-1-2001. The parent sunbirds were seen extracting nectar from the red Calandra puffs and Hibiscus flowers and feeding the chicks at nest.

21-1-2001. Chicks were heard cheeping from the nest.

31-1-2001. Chicks fledged and had flown to the rose-apple tree which is about 10 feet away.

First week of February 2002. Saw a female sunbird fluttering near a car-wiping cloth hung up to dry near the wash slab. By evening the sunbird had started building a nest on the cloth, using it for the back of her nest.

14-2-2002. Till 10.30 a.m. the nest was empty. But at 4p.m. the female was seen sitting inside the nest.

2-3-2002. The eggs must have hatched. The bird was seen flying out often. During incubation, she always went out whenever I (VRR) was at the sink washing utensils. (about 7.45 -8 a.m.)

16-2-2002. A coconut frond fell and broke the galvanized wire on which we hung clothes to dry. The line where the washcloth and nest were was also broken. It was found hanging loose near the garage wall. We pulled away the coconut frond and tied the wires back in place. After retying the nest had changed direction and was facing towards sun, thus exposing direct sun rays. The bird returned after 30-40 minutes and was incubating her eggs again.

17-2-2002. The bird had built a new portico to the nest. Now the Sun rays could not shine directly in to the nest.

There must have been only one egg. There was a single beak popping out of the nest entrance to receive food from the parents. By the end of February the chick fledged and left the nest. It received flying lessons from parents in the hedge.

In 2003 and 04 also we had sunbirds nesting in our garden. One nest with fledglings was pulled off and thrown by a squirrel on a torrential rainy day in month of April.

In December 2004, a nest was built in a new location, on a Coral Jasmine (Paarijatha) tree. The bird started incubating on 24-12-04. By 7-1-05 she was feeding the chicks. They fledged and left the nest on 23-1-05.

20-2-05. The same nest was being refurbished. The bird was feeding the chicks in the second week of March. On **18-3-2005** a strange thing happened. A female sunbird was pecking at the chicks and tearing the nest apart. I (VRR) noticed another female on a branch four feet away (possibly the owner of the nest), watching helplessly as her chicks were tortured by the intruder. The male was nowhere to be seen. I tried to drive away the intruding sunbird, but its fierce and persistent attacks resulted in

one of the chicks falling to the ground. We brought the displaced chick inside. In the meanwhile the aggressor had returned to attack the nest. Therefore, I broke the twig and brought the nest inside. The chick in the nest was disconsolate and was wildly flapping and cheeping. We fed the fallen chick with some honey mixed with water, using an ink-filler with much coaxing. Then we placed back the fallen chick into the nest and refastened the nest on to the twig with a cloth clip. The mother returned to feed the chicks. At 5 pm the chick had fallen out again. Thinking that the stronger sibling was pushing it out, I designed a fig-leaf cup, placed the chick in it and clipped the cup shaped leaf to a twig close to the nest, expecting the mother to notice her offspring. But the mother neither fed it nor went near it.

The next morning the chick had fallen to the ground. The clip and the fig-leaf were far away. We brought the chick inside and tried to feed it with honey mixed with water. But the chick threw it up and was gasping. It died at about 8 am.

However, the mother continued to feed the surviving chick at nest. At about 1 p.m. there was a strange commotion. When I (VRR) rushed out to see, the chick was dead, half of it eaten or decapitated. Later even the remains of the chick were gone and the nest was torn to shreds.

After this ill-fated incident, no sunbird has ever built a nest in our garden. There are many of these birds feeding on the hibiscus flower-nectar and Singapore cherries. But no nest building has taken place till date.

About a dozen squirrels have taken refuge in our garden. A neighbor provides idlis and dosas every morning. They are very aggressive and try to come into the house to build nests. They mark every bush, shrub, tree and plant and shriek and chase away all other birds – barbets, magpie robins, sunbirds, babblers, spotted doves, bulbuls and mynas. They even prevent them from drinking water from the lily ponds. The squirrels are rapidly increasing in number and the sunbirds have little chance of re-nesting in our garden.

CORRESPONDENCE

WHITE-BELLIED SEA EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) BREEDING AT BULCHERRY ISLAND, SUNDARBANS DELTA, INDIA. ARUNAYAN SHARMA, Centre for Ecological Engineering, Netaji Subhash Road, Malda- 732101, West Bengal

On 26th January 2005, I was carrying out a bird survey at Bulcherry Island in the extreme end of Sundarbans delta near Bay of Bengal, as a part of an international expedition in search of Spoon-billed Sandpipers (*Calidris pygmeus*) with a team of international ornithologists. Before I could reach the island from our launch at around

1025 hrs I saw a few white bellied sea eagles (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) hovering above our launch and busy in collecting some nesting materials from the seashore side. During my survey I came across many nests of The White-bellied Sea Eagle in mangrove trees. A nest was found 50 meters above sea level on a mangrove tree. The diameter of the nest was c 2 meters. After observing some individuals I noted these nests are traditional. During the survey I stayed there for six hours and surveyed a 60 kms stretch of coastline of the island. I counted five nests of White-bellied Sea Eagles in the island. The average distance between

two nests was c 10 kms. After an extensive survey I inferred that this is a good place for watching the feeding and breeding behaviour of the White-bellied Sea Eagle. The eagles are breeding here in relative safety. It should be noted that the entire Sundarbans delta including the extreme end of the Bulcherry Island was free from the Tsunami effect.



COMMENTS ON THE STATUS OF CRIMSON SUNBIRD.

ASAD RAHMANI, Director, BNHS, bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in

I read with great interest, the article entitled 'A Note on the Breeding of Crimson Sunbird (*Aethopyga siparaja*) in Ratnagiri Dist., Maharashtra,' by Rohan J. Lovalekar and Sachin B. Palkar, published in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers (Vol 46, Issue 1, Jan-Feb 2006). Interestingly, Pamela Rasmussen in her book "Birds of the Indian subcontinent : The Ripley's Guide", has separated Crimson Sunbird (*Aethopyga siparaja*) and Vigor's Sunbird (*Aethopyga vigorsii*) in to two full-fledged species, and Vigor's Sunbird is endemic to northern Western Ghats, so the observations on its breeding behaviour by Rohan and Palkar are quite significant.



PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES AMONG MAGPIE ROBINS. PRAGATI NAYAK, Aashirwad, Ayyapu Post, Puttur Taluk - 574210

I would like to comment on Pradeep Kumar Sharma's note - "Distribution of Parental Responsibilities Among Magpie Robins" - which appeared in the July-August issue of the Newsletter. We have a nest box in a guava tree in our garden and almost every year, magpie robins nest here, hence I have observed them during many breeding seasons. I don't pose to be a great authority on magpie robins but I have been observing them for many years in my garden and hence feel justified in making the following comments.

I agree that the male Magpie Robin is always on guard duty. When the female is brooding and leaves the nest for foraging, the male guards outside the nest. After the chicks have hatched, the male is always nearby. The nest is never left unattended. The female will leave the nest to hunt for food only after the male has positioned himself outside it. The male might leave when he is sure that the female is inside the nest with the chicks or just outside it.

Once the chicks are fledged and almost ready to leave the nest, their appetite seems to increase. This time, both parents bring food to them. As soon as one comes to the nest with food, the other leaves. The first does not leave again until its spouse has arrived to take its place! So both the duties of feeding the chicks and keeping an eye on them appears to be jointly shared by both parents.



RANDOM BIRD NOTES FROM CHANDIGHAR. SNEHAL PATEL, Nature Club of Surat, No 81, Sarjan Society, Athwalines, Surat 395 007

During my recent business trip to Chandighar, I had to stay back for a day which was unscheduled. The industry which I was visiting was about 50 kms, away from Chandighar on the banks of the river Beas. Therefore, I decided to stay at the Punjab Tourism Department's tourist complex 'Pink Cassia' on the bank of river Beas at Roopnagar. The location was very picturesque and in the morning the bird calls woke me up by 6.00 a.m. Even though it was still dark, I decided to take a stroll along the river bank. By sunrise I was at the riverfront near the hotel. The hotel garden overlooks the riverfront; from where I could hear the calls of a variety of birds.

There was no access to this place as it was a wetland with thick vegetation and tall trees. Thereby I had to continue my walk along the river itself. It was the beginning of winter and there was a barrage on the river just 100 meters down stream, from where a cool breeze was gracefully fanning. There were a lot of boats lying on the bank, some of them half submerged in the overflowing river waters. I wiped the dew drops from one of the boats which was gently rocking and began to relish the tranquility. As the Sun began to rise behind the swamp, the bird activity increased, with flocks of mynas flying towards their feeding grounds, chirping all the way. Each flock averaged 50 birds and some were making short sorties over the rookery to join other groups or for regrouping.

In all, more than 500 mynas were headed towards the town, of Roopnagar and it took just 15 to 20 minutes for the mynas to disappear in sorties. The sun had just cleared the tree line, when I spotted some 20 cormorants on a tree about 20 feet away. They seemed to be in no hurry to begin their fishing activities, except three individuals which took off in the direction of the river. I also saw some waterhens and lapwings foraging in the hotel garden. The fence post between the garden and the river was the perching point for the White-breasted Kingfisher whose frantic 'Ti-Ti-Ti-Ti' calls could be heard occasionally. On the previous night an owlet had used this fence post to watch out for its meal. Suddenly I heard the harsh 'Ka-Ka-Ka-Ka' calls of a Tree-pie; as usual they appeared in a pair from the swamp and flew towards the hotel garden. I was looking forward to hear their sweet call, but they disappointed me.

Fruit bats were seen flying occasionally above the swamp and landing on some trees at a distance. Suddenly I noticed a large grey bird, which I suspected to be a Grey Hornbill, flying towards the swamp and quickly disappearing behind

the swamp. Since grey hornbills usually fly about in pairs, I turned around to see if its mate was following suit. My suspicions proved right when another Grey Hornbill appeared and flew in the same direction to join its mate. Meanwhile, a Coucal landed near the shore and took off with something in its beak. A bunch of babblers came babbling and moved along the river bank, hopping and flying. They also moved into the swamp. Grey herons, Purple Herons, Cormorants and Parakeets kept flying in and out of the swamp, rather intermittently. The swamp seemed to be a haven for the birds.

From the water-edge about 30 feet away, I heard a rather funny and strange 'Qae- Qae' sound. I turned in that direction, expecting to identify the bird emerging from the aquatic vegetation. But I heard the sound once again and I rather reckoned by then, that it was the distress call of a frog, which was perhaps being swallowed by a snake, because none of the birds were in the vicinity. I at once stepped out of the boat and walked in the direction of 'Qae-Qae' sound which was still emanating, rather subdued. My eyes zeroed on a checkered keel-back (water snake) with a large frog in its mouth. I tried to freeze my movement, as I did not intend to interfere with the laws of nature. But the snake had seen my movement and it released the frog instantaneously. The frog gleefully jumped into the lake and the snake also glided into the water to save its skin. I could neither feel happy, for I saved the life of the frog, nor could I feel sorry, for the snake that lost its meal due to my unexpected interference.

By then it was 8.00 a.m., the sun was rapidly rising and the activities had more or less come to a standstill in the swamp. Behind me was the reservoir of Roopnagar barrage and I noticed groups of ducks flying and landing far away, as also other groups of white birds landing and taking off on the opposite shore. Unfortunately, I was not carrying my binoculars, as this was supposed to be a business trip. According to the manager of the hotel, this lake receives quite a large number of migratory birds in winter. The only negative point of this place is that from a place of worship, about a kilometer away on the opposite bank of the river, prayers are played on loud speakers in full blast from 6.00 to 8.00 a.m., and it is simply impossible to enjoy the songs and calls of the birds. This is a common problem all over India and in majority of the cases it is a tape recorded prayer that blares prayers from loud speakers in full volume. If not, a mechanized drumming machine is plugged to the mains to give out monotonous high pitched drumbeats. It is high time loudspeakers are banned or allowed to play only at restricted hours and that too at a low volume.



UNUSUAL PARENTAL CARE OF PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRD (*Nectarinia zeylonica*). HARISH R. BHAT, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560 012.

On the morning of 23rd March 2006, as I walked under the jackfruit tree (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*) in the quadrangle towards the library of our department, the movements of a female Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Nectarinia zeylonica*) caught my attention. It was frantically calling with loud notes and speeding from a distant branch toward the jackfruit tree with three fleeting stopovers. Its behaviour suggested that it had a nest nearby. Soon, my doubt was cleared when the bird landed at a pendant nest covered with cobweb and other cottony material. The bird was carrying a small caterpillar-like insect in its beak and it began feeding its chick(s) in the nest. I took cover and waited for the bird to return to feed the chicks again. But I was perplexed to see the same bird flying with feed in its beak towards yet another pendant nest, about five feet away from the first nest! Here also, I could clearly watch the female sunbird feeding a chick, as some movement was noticed inside the nest, even before the female landed at the nest entrance! I observed this peculiar behaviour thrice in a span of two hours. I continued my observation next day too! The same sequence of feeding was repeated twice. However, I could not continue my observations due to my other pressing commitments. I am keen to know whether this type of behaviour has been observed earlier. I am also curious to know as to why this female sunbird was interested in feeding chicks of two different nests?

Crested Tree Swift at nest. The nest is very small, shallow, half cup, fixed bracket-wise to the side of a tiny horizontal branch. Photo : Ashok C Mansoor.



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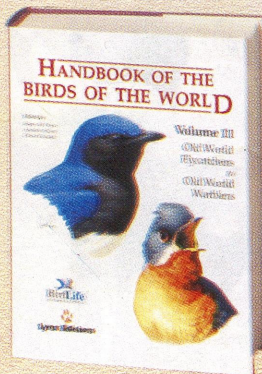


Plate 19 from Volume 11 of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, Painted by Hilary Burn. Reduced Scale. Actual Size 31 x 24 Cm.

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