

Comments on "Drongos and the mixed species feeding flocks" by Lalitha Vijayan et al.

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I have a variety of reservations about the paper. It has deficiencies on several counts considered important.

1. Findings do not seem to be sufficiently novel or perhaps authors have not been able to present them in an attractive way.

2. As it stands the paper lacks a conceptual framework. There are perfunctory references to theoretical papers. Instead a succinct summary of such ideas will help readers a lot. There is no point in only saying (p. 4) that such and such finding is in accordance with the economics of flock size.

I find reference (repeated) to a paper in preparation (Vijayan and Joshi) very irritating. The editor must decide the policy on this. But in my opinion references to inaccessible material should be avoided.

3. In general the discussion lacks clarity. Notice the phrase on page 4 para 2 namely "This might be due to...". This is just speculation. Not a well supported scientific claim. Similar phrase occurs on p. 8 para 1. "which may be related to its bill morphology" (Infact this whole paragraph is incoherent). It ~~is~~ also ends with "might help in reducing competition". See also page 10 para 2. All such sentences need to be restructured.

I think claims 3 and 4 on page 10 are made without any systematic support.

4. Handling of tables, charts and statistical matters is also unsatisfactory.

(a) p. 3 para 2 line 6: occurrence of Bronzed was more. Is this significantly more? No statistical test was applied here. Table 5 as it is given is unnecessary. Instead 2 x 2 tables of frequencies will be more informative.

(b) I am not sure if figures 1 and 2 are illuminating. Figure 3 is confusing. The key should be made part of the figure (i.e. write S, A, G R etc. inside the bars). On the whole, these don't make a significant point for the space they take up.

Curiously, sometimes you expect a table or some evidence but it is missing. Assertions 3 and 4 on page 10 deserved such support. They seem interesting.

I have made some comments on the script also.

All in all the paper is heavy on data and light on ideas. It does not have a good flow of coherent arguments.

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I have the following suggestions, most of them designed to place the paper in a larger context and bring out its significance for a wider range of readers:

1. In the introduction, mention explicitly that many other drongo species have been recorded as participating in mixed flocks in Africa, Asia, Indonesia, and New Guinea. Consider adding a paragraph, with references, for such drongos documented as flock participants.
2. The present introduction consists of a very brief single paragraph. Consider expanding the introduction with a paragraph mentioning the interesting questions of general biological interest posed by flocks.
3. Around page 2, include a short account of the three drongo species. Readers would be helped by having gathered in one place the following information for each species: its size (body weight), relative abundance, resident status, diet, noisiness, and preferred foraging techniques.
4. Similarly, provide around page 2 a short account of the types of mixed-species feeding flocks encountered. For example, in New Guinea there are two quite distinct types of flocks, a type including medium-sized omnivores and another type including small insectivores. Similarly, in South America there are several types of flocks differing in body size, diet, and preferred foraging height above the ground. Can you distinguish several types of flocks in India? If so, say something about which type of flock each drongo species prefers to associate with.
5. Pages 14 - 15 list the advantages to be gained from participation in flocks. This section now consists of a catalogue of suggested benefits for flocks in general, with only a couple of sentences about the specific drongos discussed in this paper. Page 14 states that the significance of these flocks is discussed in detail in a separate paper by Vijayan and Joshi, in preparation. I feel, however, that much of the interest of the observations of this paper would derive from discussion of their significance, and that the present paper should either provide considerably more detail on what each drongo species is doing in the observed flocks and what benefits might thereby be gained, or else the present paper should be published back-to-back with the manuscript by Vijayan and Joshi.

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