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Address: 6 Seal Street, Paddington, Queensland 4064, AUSTRALIA

SOME OBSERVATIONS OF BIRDS FORAGING IN *TREMA ORIENTALIS*

D. McWirter

From 15:00 to 16:00 on 28 May 1983, from 14:45 to 16:30 on 30 May, and from 15:15 to 15:45 on 31 May, I observed a variety of birds foraging in a *Trema orientalis* adjacent to the main office of the Wau Ecology Institute (W.E.I.). The identity of the two trees mentioned below, and information about them was kindly supplied by Allen Allison, Acting Director of W.E.I. Observations were obtained with 10x40 Leitz binoculars at 30 to 40 meters.

Trema orientalis is a fairly common tree on the grounds and in the coffee groves of W.E.I. It is not one of the trees planted to provide shade for coffee; rather, it springs up adventitiously and is allowed to persist. It's a fast-growing, short-lived tree with a broad, comparatively open crown. This particular tree was an estimated 13 m tall with a crown diameter of nearly the same. The tree was in fruit and was noticeably suffering leaf damage from insects, one of which, perhaps the main one, was a lepidopteran larva 5 to 7cm long, coloured light green to brown. With one exception, the species of birds that foraged in the tree fed exclusively on fruit, caterpillars or small insects.

The following is a list of species seen in the tree, the number of each species seen when present, and what was eaten by that species, if anything:

Brown Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia amboinensis*
1 to 2, not seen eating.
Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove *M. nigrirostris*
1, ate fruit.
Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*
3 to 15, ate fruit.
Double-eyed Fig-Parrot *Cyclopsitta diophthalma*
2 to 3, ate fruit.
Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo *Cacomantis castaneiventris*
1 to 2, ate caterpillars.
Malay Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus*
1, not seen eating.
White-crowned Koel *Caliechthrus leucolophus*
1 to 2, ate caterpillars.

Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*
1, ate caterpillars.
Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
1, used the tree as a perch to forage from, did not forage within the tree's canopy.
Black-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina morio*
1 to 2, ate caterpillars.
Northern Fantail *Rhipidura rufiventris*
1, stayed only briefly, did not forage.
Pachycephala sp.,
1, not seen eating.
Hooded Pitohui *Pitohui dichrous*
1 to 2, ate caterpillars and other, smaller insects.
Brown Oriole *Oriolus szalayi*
1 to 2, ate caterpillars and other, smaller insects.
Marbled Honeyeater *Pycnopygius cinereus*
1, stayed briefly, did not forage.
Helmeted Friarbird *Philemon buceroides*
2 to 3, not seen eating.
Papuan Flowerpecker *Dicaeum pectorale*
1 to 4, ate small insects.

No species was in the tree for the entire observation period. Most came and fed for varying periods, then left. As a species, the Rainbow Lorikeet spent the most time in the tree. As individuals, the Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo spent the most time. The Rainbow Lorikeets spent a lot of time in the tree just climbing around and interacting with each other. Two Double-eyed Fig-Parrots sat and preened and allo-preened for 15 minutes. A White-crowned Koel sat and called for nearly 20 minutes after eating several large caterpillars.

The caterpillar eaters exhibited several ways of finding prey, several ways of manipulating prey once it was caught, and took varying time to manipulate the prey before consumption. The Chestnut-breasted Cuckoos hunted by walking along slender branches and peering about, or they sat in one place for at least five minutes while looking about. If a caterpillar was seen while hunting in the latter way, the bird would fly to the nearest branch and pick the insect off. After capture, the larvae was battered on a large branch and crunched between the bird's mandibles until pulped enough to swallow. This usually took between one and two minutes. White-crowned Koels hunted by walking on larger branches than the previous species. If a caterpillar was spotted, they leaped/flew and semi-crashed their way over to it, battered it on the nearest large branch, and consumed it in less than a minute.

The Sacred Kingfisher was a sit-and-wait hunter that flew to the prey, hovered briefly, and picked it off. The one time the kingfisher was seen handling the prey after capture, it so vigourously battered the insect on a branch that pieces of the insect were lost. Handling time before consumption was uncertain. Both the Black-shouldered Cuckoo-shrikes and the Brown Orioles moved frequently in the smaller branches while peering

around. One cuckoo-shrike hovered briefly in order to pick a caterpillar off a leaf. Both species battered their prey and ran it through their mandibles. Both averaged about a minute in handling time before consumption.

There seems to be a rough inverse correlation between the mass of the bird and handling time for similar sized prey.

The number of species present in the tree during the same time period varied from day to day. On 31 May, only three species were present, and during the same time on 30 May, seven or eight species were there. On 28 May, close track was not kept, but no more than four species were present in that time period. There was heavy rainfall for one hour prior to the 30 May observation period. This may have stimulated insect activity, or the birds may have been catching up on their feeding before retiring for the night.

Some incidental observations were made. Chestnut-breast Cuckoos and a Brown Oriole were seen taking caterpillars from other *Trema orientalis* on the W.E.I. grounds. A Rainbow Lory was seen drinking liquid from an upturned flower of a nearby African Tulip-Tree (*Spathodea campanulata*) after the rain on 30 May. Finally, as unequivocal proof that pure research pays off, I saw an unexpected lifer while making these observations - a Blue-faced Parrot-Finch *Erythrura trichroa*.

Address: PSC1, Box 27481, APO SF, COLORADO 96230, U.S.A.

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER *CALIDRIS BAIRDII* AT KANOSIA LAGOON - FIRST RECORD FOR THE NEW GUINEA REGION

BRIAN W. FINCH

LOCATION AND HABITAT

Four members of the Papua New Guinea Bird Society (myself, Roger Hicks, and Joan & Michael Oliver) were investigating Kanosia Lagoon, Central Province, on 24 November 1985, to see what migrant species were being attracted by the drying out process that was leaving extensive area of oozy mud with scattered drier islands and shallow pools.

Whilst the area had been too wet for the main passage of waders, and sadly most had passed over without stopping on the southward passage, the increasing suitability of habitat was attracting the later migrants, and there were over a hundred palaearctic waders present.

Species present consisted of approximately a hundred Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata*, one Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, five Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola*, one Eastern Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica fulva*, and ten Japanese Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*. A pair of Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* turned out to be of the resident race *dubius*.

The observers had spilt up and were each checking out different parts of the lagoon. Whilst returning from the farther north-eastern portion, I saw a wader feeding in the company of a party of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and one Marsh Sandpiper. The bird was obviously different and was thought to be a Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*, although the species had not previously been recorded in the New Guinea region before. Two observers studied the wader for over twenty minutes taking detailed notes, and sketching the bird in the field.

Whilst the other two members of the PNGBS were making their way down the hill to the lagoon and heading towards the birds, the small flock startled, and flew further down the lagoon some 50 m away, and from this assemblage single birds and pairs peeled off and headed past us back down the lagoon towards the area in which the unusual sandpiper was first discovered. In spite of a thorough search by all four observers the bird could not be relocated amongst the thirty or more birds feeding in the shallow pools and on the dry mud with tangles of dead vegetation.

We later found the Baird's Sandpiper at the edge of a small pool. After a short time it, together with a dozen Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, flew up and after circling the far end of the lagoon, all flew out of sight.

DESCRIPTION

The bird stood up to a centimetre shorter than the accompanying Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, the body bulk was slighter but the entire length was comparable, because of the very long wings which extended well beyond, and totally obscured the tail.

Head: Wholly brownish-grey (the field notes read as cold greeny-grey), slightly browner on the crown with no obvious supercilium, this being reduced to a pale line just above, and slightly beyond, the eye. There was no darkening around the ear coverts as in most *Calidris* waders.

Throat/breast: Although the chin was not observed while the bird fed, the throat appeared cold grey, and this continued on to the lower throat where there was narrow but obscure streaking although the background colour was uniform with head. This streaking broke off quite noticeably just in front of the bend of the wing, where the white of the underparts extended upwards.

Flanks: Along the sides of the breast and flanks was a line of irregularly shaped indistinct orange-brownish spots.

Underparts: The remainder of the underparts were white without any marking or suffusions.