

recognised as such. The ifrita was seen sitting in the nest and tending to it for not much more than 30 seconds, although it could have been there longer as it was not seen arriving. It did not reappear during this first period of observation nor during a subsequent visit.

Rand, A.L. & E.T. Gilliard. 1967. *The Handbook of New Guinea Birds*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

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### EASTERN ALPINE MANNIKINS *LONGHURA MONTICOLA* NESTING

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While at Myola (Northern Province), 16 - 19 September 1988, we observed two Eastern Alpine Mannikins *Lonchura monticola* nest building near the village (2100 m). The birds were carrying material from a patch of rushes on the village side of the stream and building c. 3 m above the ground in a small tree on the far bank.

The domed nest appeared to be entirely constructed of rushes and grasses. It had an entrance hole in one side which was neatly woven, unlike the nests of some other species of mannikin. Another nest was in a similar tree and situated further down the creek.

Myola is lower than the normal altitude range for this species (Beehler *et al.* 1986) but Eastern Alpine Mannikins have regularly been recorded there over the past two years (Hicks 1987).

Beehler, B.M., T.K. Pratt & D.A. Zimmerman. 1986. *Birds of New Guinea*. Princeton University Press.

Hicks, R.K. 1987. An extension of altitude for two mannikin species. *Muruk* 2(1):60.

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### OBSERVATIONS OF THE FEEDING HABITS OF SOME NEW GUINEA BIRDS IN MADANG PROVINCE

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Incidental to my studies of vocalizations of various New Guinea birds conducted between 17 December 1988 and 26 January 1989 I made observations on their feeding habits at various localities near Madang (Baitabag, Nitul, Alexishaven, Jais Aben, Rivo) and on Bagabag Island, Madang Province. Here, I report on data for eight species belonging to three families as a contribution to the growing literature on food habits of birds from this fascinating biogeographical region.

#### Buff-faced Pygmy Parrot *Micropsitta pusio*.

Little is known about the food habits of this or any other species of pygmy parrot. Stomach contents of *M. pusio* taken on Bagabag Island, Madang Province, consisted of (unidentified) insects and a white paste (Diamond & LeCroy 1979). Forshaw (1977) observed two individuals eating lichen, and indicated that they also fed on fruits, seeds, insects and larvae. One most often sees these diminutive birds moving up or down the trunks and branches of trees and picking up small objects from the bark surface or flaking off pieces of bark and consuming the items thus exposed.

Beehler *et al.* (1986) state that they feed on "lichens, bark fungus (and termites?)" suggesting that termites have not been determined with certainty as a part of this parrot's diet. The following observations indicate that these insects may indeed be an important food item for *Micropsitta*.

On 24 January 1989, I heard pygmy parrots calling from high in coconut trees at the road junction between Jais Aben and Rivo village. I soon located two individuals perched against the trunk just below the crown. A termitarium of *Microceratermes biroi* (Termitidae) protruded from the tree trunk close to the birds.

Arboreal termitaria are usually melon-shaped structures consisting of woody material pasted against a tree trunk or branches. Tunnels made of the same woody material emanate in various directions from the main termitarium. If the tunnel material is scraped away, the passageways are exposed and legions of termites pour forth.

When first located, one of the parrots was busy tearing apart one of the termite passageways. The two then flew to a second coconut tree about 5 m away, which supported a small termite nest c. 0.5 m in length. One parrot immediately started removing pieces from the upper part of the termitarium facing the tree crown. The other was flaking off pieces of bark from the coconut tree and tearing off pieces from