

Short Communication

Interspecific feeding by Indian Robin (*Copsychus fulicatus*) to Brown Rock Chat (*Oenanthe fusca*)

Dipesh Kumar Jangir¹, Rounak Choudhary^{2*}, Vivek Sharma¹, Subhash Chandra¹

Abstract - Interspecific feeding is recorded in numerous bird species across the world, however, there are limited published observations from India. We provide the first documentation of a non-brood parasitic interspecific feeding between an Indian Robin (*Copsychus fulicatus*) and a Brown Rock Chat (*Oenanthe fusca*) fledgling from the Central Aravalli hill region of Ajmer, Rajasthan, India.

Key words: interspecific feeding, alloparenting, Brown Rock Chat, Indian Robin, Ajmer.

Riassunto - Alimentazione interspecifica da parte del pettirosso indiano (*Copsychus fulicatus*) alla sassicola bruna (*Oenanthe fusca*).

L'alimentazione interspecifica è stata registrata in numerose specie di uccelli in tutto il mondo, ma le osservazioni pubblicate in India sono limitate. Forniamo la prima documentazione di un'alimentazione interspecifica non parassitaria tra un pettirosso indiano (*Copsychus fulicatus*) e una sassicola bruna (*Oenanthe fusca*) nella regione collinare dell'Aravalli centrale di Ajmer, Rajasthan, India.

Parole chiave: Ajmer, alimentazione interspecifica, cure alloparentali, *Copsychus fulicarius*, *Oenanthe fusca*.

BACKGROUND

Interspecific feeding is an uncommon behavior in which an individual of one species feeds individuals of another species (Emlen & Vehrencamp, 1983). In major instances, interspecific feeding is exhibited by species involved in brood parasitism (Davies, 2000). The overlapping of habitat and territories are prerequisites for interspecific feeding (McNair & Dwyck, 1991). Many studies sug-

gest that begging fledglings may lead to indiscriminate interspecific feeding by allospecific individuals (Farmer *et al.*, 2008). Helper species may acquire parental care skills by involving in interspecific feeding and alloparenting activities which might help take care of their offspring in future (Riedman, 1982). Sometimes birds involve in such activities to lessen the loud begging and calling of fledglings which might attract predators to nesting sites (Sealy & Lorenzana, 1997).

OBSERVATION

We observed an interspecific feeding between an Indian Robin (*Copsychus fulicatus*) feeding to the fledgling of Brown Rock Chat (*Oenanthe fusca*) in the Aravalli hills (26°30'18.8"N 74°40'24.9"E) of Ajmer district, Rajasthan, India. In March 2023, a male Indian Robin was seen as a helper in feeding the fledgling of a Brown Rock Chat, as recorded in photos (Fig. 1) and videos. The biological parents were simultaneously feeding the fledgling. The instance was recorded a week-long period and for 27 times Indian robin fed the fledgling of Brown rock-chat.

DISCUSSION

We present here the first record of interspecific feeding of Brown Rock Chat (*Oenanthe fusca*) by Indian Robin (*Copsychus fulicatus*), both species are terrestrial and endemic to the Indian sub-continent, prefer nesting in scrubland and rocky area and belong to the same family, Muscicapidae. The interspecific feeding behavior was not described in these species earlier (Kumar, 2012; Das *et al.*, 2017)

Various studies have linked such instances with families of species, sex of helpers, nest distances, the morphology of fledglings and parental instincts as possible reasons causing interspecific feeding (Shy, 1982; Harmáčková, 2021). Recently published literature shows that the Order Passeriformes is primarily associated with interspecific feeding behaviour (Hall *et al.*, 2010; Fiss *et al.*, 2016; Burbidge, 2018; Reitsma, 2019). The majority of song-bird species are altricial, their young need care and feed from parents (Skutch, 1957), this may provide one species with more chances to meet other species' nests and to expend the energy and urge to care for nestlings else-

¹ Department of Zoology, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University, Ajmer, Rajasthan, India.

² Department of Environmental Science (Centre for Excellence), Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University, Ajmer, Rajasthan, India.

* Corresponding author: rounakchoudhary17@gmail.com

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Fig. 1 - A) Brown Rock Chat (Biological Parent) feeding the chick. / La sassicola bruna (genitore biologico) che nutre il pulcino. B) Adult male Robin feeding the Brown Rock Chat's chick. / Pettiorosso indiano maschio adulto che nutre il pulcino di sassicola bruna.

where before his progeny hatch (Skutch, 1961; Cockburn, 1998). In other cases, there is a possibility that one species can be possibly lured by loud calls of nearby nestlings of other species (Dearborn & Lichtenstein, 2002; Morozov, 2014; Burbidge, 2018). Interspecific feeding occurs mostly during the breeding season and thus might be linked with nesting and breeding behaviours. However, other than straightforward interpretations, no significant justifications are provided for such behaviours. Controlled investigations should be used to identify the mechanisms behind such behaviour and reveal whether interspecific feeding is adaptive or just an aberration with no evolutionary significance.

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