



First Record of Jungle Babbler *Argya striata* Feeding on House Gecko *Hemidactylus sp.*

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Short Communication

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ABSTRACT

We report the first record of jungle babbler *Argya striata* feeding on house gecko *Hemidactylus sp.* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. On the morning of 09th October 2018, a small group of jungle babblers consisting of six adults and two fledglings were observed in and around plants pots and compost bins on the roof of author's residence. A juvenile house gecko *Hemidactylus sp.* appeared to have incidentally flushed out of a crevice by the foraging birds. It was immediately attacked by two adults and was killed quickly by heavy pecking on gecko's body. The gecko's tail was quickly fed upon by one of the two attacking birds after tail autotomy. Once the gecko stopped moving, the two attacking birds tried consuming the gecko whole but soon dropped it as it appeared to be too big to swallow the whole body. They started pecking out small pieces from the head and stomach area. At one point, the two birds held the gecko from two places, one from the head and the other held a front limb and started to tug. Other members of the group were uninterested in the entire event and did not participate. The two attacking birds continued pecking out small pieces until they weren't hungry anymore. They left the remaining body and joined the resting members of the group.

Keywords: Jungle babbler; *Hemidactylus sp.*; fledgelings; gecko; insectivorous feeding.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The jungle babbler *Argya striata* is a commonly occurring, resident species in India [1]. They are often wrongly called “seven sisters” due to their gregarious nature but group sizes can be between 2 and 20 birds [2]. At 25 cm., jungle babbler is a medium sized babbler with pale eye, whitish lores, yellow bill, and dull brownish-grey plumage, lightly streaked on back and breast [3]. A lookalike species is the yellow-billed babbler *Argya affinis*, however, it is endemic to Southern India and Sri Lanka with no distribution in Gujarat [4]. This species was previously placed in the genus *Turdoides* but was moved to the genus *Argya* in 2018 [5]. They are primarily insectivorous feeding on various insects like flies, ants, termites, crickets, grasshoppers, beetles, moths, butterflies, dragonflies, mantis, bees, wasps, cockroaches, bugs, and spiders [6,7]. They are considered beneficial to agriculture as there are also known to feed on pest insects like *Helicoverpa armigera* and their larvae [8]. While

they actively forage for insects, they also feed on grains and seeds like rice, wheat, millet, maize, berries, and fig fruits [6]. They are known to also feed on nectar of Silk cotton tree *Bombax ceiba* [6]. Parent jungle babblers, however, almost exclusively feed insects, flies and their larvae to their chicks [7]. This habit probably makes them a commonly chosen host species by pied cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* [9] and common hawk *Hierococcyx varius* [10] for brood parasitism. Their diet preference may however be dependent on relative availability of different food resources, which further may differ seasonally.

A strong link is always assumed between the shape of the beak and feeding habits [11], however, on the contrary, there is a rather weak correlation between the shape of the beak and overall feeding habits [12]. Mandibles of jungle babblers are well adapted for a carnivorous diet [13] but their diet indicates they are opportunistically omnivorous exploiting available food resources [6].



Fig. 1. Jungle babblers trying to break smaller, consumable pieces of the house gecko they hunted

2. CONCLUSION

The observation reported in this note suggests such opportunistic hunting and feeding may be occurring more often than it is currently documented.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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