

Short communication

**AN UNUSUAL OBSERVATION ON SEARCHING FOR A MISSING
YOUNG ONE AND PARENTAL PROVISIONING IN PURPLE
SUNBIRD (*Nectarinia asiaticus* Latham, 1790)**

Kailash Chand Saini¹ and Sanjay Keshari Das²

¹Modi Institute of Technology and Science, Lakshmangarh, Sikar, Rajasthan-332311, India

E-mail: sainikailashchand78@gmail.com

²University School of Environment Management, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha
University, Sector-16C, Dwarka, New Delhi-110075, India

E-mail: skdasipu@gmail.com

Abstract: Here we provide an observation on searching by the parents of purple sunbird (*Nectarinia asiaticus* Latham, 1790) for their missing young one followed by parental provisioning by them. This case was unusual as both the parents were searching the young one even after one day past and the female parent fed the young one freely sitting on the hand of the young bird's care taker. The observation also confirms that both the parents of this bird provide parental care. The juvenile bird was reaching the fledging stage and in the entire observation it was fed by the female parent alone; that supports that the male parent withdraws himself from feeding activity as the young reaches the fledging state.

Keywords: Purple sunbird, Parental provisioning, Young one.

The purple sunbird (*Nectarinia asiaticus* Latham, 1790) is one of the common birds in the Indian sub-continent which is mostly a resident bird in most part of its range (Kazmierczak, 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005; Grimmett et al., 2011), except local migration in some areas (Douglas, 1908). In Rajasthan, it is seen throughout the year. They are omnivorous, predominantly feeds on nectars and help in pollination (hence commonly known as honey suckers). They also feed on insects, particularly during breeding season and during period of provisioning food to young ones (Ghadirian et al., 2007). Here, we provide an unusual observation on searching by the parents of this bird for their missing young one and parental provisioning by them that was observed at Lakshmangarh village, Sikar district, Rajasthan, India.

Lakshmangarh village (75° 02' 16.6'' E; 27° 49' 30.6'' N) is located on the eastern Rajasthan just at the out fringe of Thar Desert. The area comes under the Biogeographic Zone Semi arid (Rodgers et. al., 2002) where local sand storm or 'aandhi' is quite common during summer. On 17th June 2012, there was an 'aandhi' in the afternoon (at about 4 pm) for about forty five minute and immediately after the storm was over, a juvenile purple sunbird (Figure

2) was noticed lying in an exhausted condition at the door step of Saini's house. Probably the bird must have fallen down from its nest and blown up with wind. Saini brought the bird in hand and sprinkled some water on its head and body. Within 4-5 minutes the bird became conscious and after about 10 minutes slowly started calling "chip; chweet; chweet; chweet". Then Saini released the bird in hope that the parents may come and take the bird back with them. But till evening neither parent of the bird was observed. Then he took the bird into his house to save the little bird from the predators out of its nest. That time the bird was silent. Immediately after it was released in a room it slowly moved to one corner of that room. Saini put grains of wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) and pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*) for its feeding, but the bird didn't take anything.

Next day early morning (around 6 am), Saini woke up by loud and harassing call of the little bird. He observed the bird was roaming here and there inside the room with continuous calling. Probably it was hungry. He decided to release the bird outside so that it can feed on its natural food. When he scanned for outside he was surprised to see one adult male and female purple sunbird were roaming desperately near his window and calling at regular intervals. Probably they had recognised the call of their juvenile and may be the parents. Then Saini brought the juvenile bird on his hand to outside, but with no time the female bird came and sat on his hand with spread wings and started grasping the bill of the juvenile bird. Within few seconds she flew away to the nearby plant (within 300 m), came back and fed the juvenile bird by bill grasping into its mouth (Figure 3). She repeated the feeding in the same way by moving 6-7 times to the nearby trees and scrubby vegetation. In this feeding activity the female bird spent about 5-6 minute. But the male bird (Figure 1) was roaming silently on the ground when the female was feeding. It was more surprising that after feeding, the female parent flew away from the site followed by the male without taking the juvenile with them. It forced Saini to bring back the bird again into his house. He left the bird inside the same room where it was kept earlier and observed the bird for about 10 minute. This time the bird was cool and silently roaming inside the room.

At about 5 pm in the afternoon, Saini observed the same parents were perching silently near the window of his house. Again he brought the juvenile outside on his hand and the female parent immediately started feeding it like before. This time also the male was silently roaming on the ground. But just after 3-4 minute feeding by the female (that moved thrice to the nearby vegetation during the period) the juvenile bird jumped from the hand and started skipping on the ground. Both the parents flew away to the nearby vegetation where they sat

on the ground. They were calling at regular intervals and watching their juvenile. The juvenile followed them by skipping. Saini watched them for about 15 minutes, but till his last sighting the juvenile was on the ground with both the parents; though the parents were moving between the ground and vegetation at intervals. He then moved back to his house. After 1 hr, when he checked for the birds, he found none of them were there; probably the parents must have taken the juvenile into their nest.

In this case, searching for the missing young one by both the parents even after one day past and the female parent sitting freely on the hand of the young bird's care taker for feeding is unusual as so far this type of behaviour is not reported in this bird. The observation also confirms that both the parents of this bird provide parental care that supports observations by Wesley (1991). The juvenile bird was reaching the fledging stage and in the entire observation it was fed by the female parent alone. This again supports view of Wesley (1991) according to whom the male parent withdraws himself from feeding activity as the young reaches the fledging state.

REFERENCES

- [1] Kazmierczak, K. 2000. A field guide to the birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives. 1st edn., Pica Press & Christopher Helm, London.
- [2] Rasmussen, P.C. & Anderton, J.C. 2005. Birds of South Asia: the ripley guide. Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. & Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.
- [3] Grimmett, R, Inskipp, C. & Inskipp, T. 2011. Birds of the Indian subcontinent. 2nd edn., Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm, London.
- [4] Douglas, D. 1908. Local bird-migration in India. Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. 18:2:343–356.
- [5] Ghadirian, T., Qashqaei A.T. & Mohsen, D. 2007. Notes on feeding and breeding habits of the purple sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan, Southern Iran. Podoces. 2:2: 122–126.
- [6] Rodgers, W.A., Panwar, H.S. & Mathur, V.B. 2002. Wildlife Protected Area Network in India: a review (executive summary). Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.
- [7] Wesley, H.D. 1991. Parental care in the purple sunbird. Newsletter for Bird Watchers. 16:3&4): 2-3.



Figure 1: Male



Figure 2: Juvenile



Figure 3: Female feeding the juvenile