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Short Notes — Notes Courtes

Predation of a Bronze Mannikin *Spermestes cucullatus* nest by a Pied Crow *Corvus albus*

Tye (1983) described the predation by two Pied Crows *Corvus albus* of two nests of the Bronze Mannikin *Spermestes cucullatus* near Freetown in Sierra Leone. The crows were observed to detach and fly off with still intact mannikin nests and the observer was unable to establish what they did with them, but speculated that the crows might destroy the nests to predate the contents.

Just after 09h00 on 8 Sep 2008 I observed a Pied Crow drop down into a small, thickly foliated tree opposite the Engineering Guesthouse on the campus of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. The bird disappeared into the leaves and emerged shortly afterwards carrying the entire nest of a Bronze Mannikin, much as described by Tye (1983). It dropped to the ground quite close to the tree and there released the nest; at this point the nest entrance was almost certainly out of the crow's sight, being close to the surface of the ground and on the side of the nest furthest from where the crow was standing. The crow first tugged with its beak a couple of times at the outside of the nest, with little effect. It then ceased its tugging and undertook what appeared to be a careful inspection of the nest exterior, quickly locating the entrance hole. After positioning itself suitably, it lowered its head to ground level, turned it sideways, and inserted its beak horizontally through the nest hole and into the nest. When the beak was withdrawn it was seen to be holding a small white object, presumably an egg, which was immediately swallowed. This procedure was repeated a further three times. The crow then flew off, leaving the nest on the ground. In all cases the eggs withdrawn in the crow's beak appeared to be whole and undamaged. Subsequent inspection of the nest showed no eggs remaining in the nest and no evidence of any egg breakage.

What is striking about this observation is the careful approach taken by the crow in accessing the contents of the mannikin's nest. The way the crow positioned its head so that the beak could be inserted cleanly through the nest entrance and the delicacy with which each egg was retrieved intact before being swallowed whole meant that none of the food value of the eggs was wasted.

Reference

TYE, A. (1983) Nest predation by the Pied Crow *Corvus albus*. *Malimbus* 5: 50.

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