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BREEDING BEHAVIOUR OF A PAIR OF BLACK AND WHITE FLYCATCHERSBias musicus AT FREETOWN

G.D. Field

Bias musicus is a widespread though not abundant resident on the outskirts of the forest round Freetown. It is very conspicuous, both through its habit of sitting out in the open on exposed treetop branches and, more particularly, because of the loud and frequent calls of the male at all times of year but especially when breeding. A pair seems to need a large territory and I have not met pairs within audible distance of each other. There is usually more than one pair at Fourah Bay College, but at opposite ends of the campus, and my records refer to one pair at the edge of college ground.

On 29th March, 1969 a nest was begun in an almost isolated thirty foot high tree (Ficus sp) in my garden, with both birds trying out a particular fork, sitting there and shuffling round and the female depositing what looked like spiders' webs. However, this was abandoned and the pair moved across the valley. In 1970 from mid February on, the female was seen occasionally with nest material but the nest was not discovered until 14th March when the clutch of three was complete and incubation had begun. It was in the same Ficus c.25 feet up in a fork where several small branches diverged. The tree was leafless though the old leaves had been there when building started and the new leaves began to grow almost at once but provided no real shade until after the young had hatched. The nest was only discovered because a Great Spotted Cuckoo Clamator glandarius perched in a tree 15 yards away. Both flycatchers dived at it repeatedly, calling wildly, until it flew off. This was characteristic: during nesting attacks were noted on Lizard Buzzard Kaupifalco monogrammicus, Senegal Coucal Centropus senegalensis, Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike Campephaga phoenicea, and a raptor, probably the Goshawk Accipiter tachiro, all some distance from the nest tree, while birds driven from the tree itself included Blue-cheeked Bee-eater Merops superciliosus, Sharp-billed Honeyguide Prodotiscus insignis, and Lemon-bellied Crombec Sylvietta denti, though odd bulbuls, thrushes and weavers which passed through the tree were not molested.

Incubation was shared equally. The male, coming to relieve his mate, advertised his presence, his loud 'te-heuw's getting nearer until he eventually arrived at the tree. If the day was hot the female normally flew off at once. (Both birds when sitting seemed to feel the heat, regularly opening and shutting their beaks). Later in the day or under cloudy conditions the female was more reluctant to leave and the male often retired, later returning to perch close beside the nest. When the female left he usually went straight to the nest, though often pausing at the edge to utter more calls and fidgeting on the nest, moving his head from side to side. The female always flew directly to the nest, making only a small buzzing call as she approached, and the male always left immediately.

Observations could not be continuous, but several hours were spent watching and the events of one afternoon may be taken as typical. (All times have been rounded off to the nearest minute).

March 26 Female on nest Semi-clouded sky and strong wind

- 2.58 pm Male heard in distance  
 3.00 arrived in tree, off again almost at once calling 'te-heuw's  
 3.04 back in tree, calling soft 'weet weet weet'  
 3.05 off again with a caterpillar caught from the new leaves  
 3.09 heard in distance 'weet weet'  
 3.12 back in tree, 'te-heuw' followed by single 'weet's  
 3.16 off again, calling 'te-heuw'  
 3.18 heard calling 'te-heuw's in distance  
 3.24 " " " " "  
 3.25 in tree. Female left at once with sharp buzz. Male, calling a sharp crescendo 'weet weet weet weet', dived after an insect  
 3.28 onto nest, after female had flown past buzzing  
 3.54 pair of raptors (goshawks ?) calling in thick bushes nearby. Male at once 'te-heuw'ing on nest  
 3.55 off in pursuit of raptor which flew rapidly past at some distance  
 3.58 reappeared and sat in neighbouring tree calling several times  
 4.01 onto nest. Much 'te-heuw'ing from nest  
 4.12 Female silently straight to nest. Male sat in tree 'te-heuw'ing, then off  
 4.27 'te-heuw' twice from neighbouring tree and heard calling off and on till  
 4.33 back in tree. Off again  
 4.41 back in tree, calling  
 4.42 Female away with a single buzz and Male straight to nest still calling  
 5.27 flew off calling loudly as a man walked beneath the tree  
 5.29 Female approached high in air with several small 'tzzz' noises; dropped almost vertically onto nest.

The young hatched on 28th March and were fed from the start by both parents, generally with small unidentified insects though at times butterflies (small Lycaenids) were given. Larger butterflies which the adults ate (e.g. Precis oenone) were not seen to be given, nor the caterpillars which the adults took from the Ficus leaves. In the early stages one parent brooded the young most of the time while the other foraged. Intervals between feeding ranged from 2 to 34 minutes, averaging at about 16 minutes between feeds. Even on the first day there was a period of 12 minutes (2.41-2.53 pm) when the nest was unattended, apparently in full sun, though it is possible the young leaves already provided some shade. Turns were regular; only once was the male seen to feed and fly off leaving the female still brooding. There was the same difference in approach, the male calling even at the nest edge, the female approaching usually with a single 'tzzz'.

The leaves were roughly fully grown by 7th April, and had provided considerable shade for some days before this. Unfortunately, they also prevented direct viewing of the nest from a distance, so that it is not known when more or less continuous brooding ceased, but certainly from early

in April both adults were fully engaged in bringing food. The young did not leave the nest till their 21st day of life, after some days of bulging precariously over the nest edge.

The first young flew at 3.30 pm on 17th April, about 12 ft., to the far side of the nest tree, where it sat unmoving being fed occasionally. At c 5.30 a second fledgling joined it, much more active, and soon after 6.00 No. 2, followed by No. 1, left the tree and moved out of sight into some bushy-topped trees. No. 3 was still in the nest at dusk. Next day from 1.00 pm till dusk one fledgling was on the ground and later on a strand of creeper two feet up about forty feet from the nest tree. It was fed exclusively by the male, and the female and other young were not seen. Thereafter they left the garden though the male could often be heard calling, but on 30th April both parents were seen together with two juveniles looking very wobbly and apparently still totally dependent on the adults. On 7th and 14th May the parents were seen with one juvenile and on the 22nd with two. These four were again seen on 31st May when the male fed one of them a butterfly - six weeks after leaving the nest. A day or two later however the male drove off one juvenile which approached with the shivering begging attitude, and later dived repeatedly at it as at an intruder.

On 12th June the pair was alone, back at the nest tree, and on the 14th the male was driving off all intruders, even bulbuls, and the female was noted with nest material. A nest was built at the far side of the same tree, too high to be inspected. I went on leave on 28th June without being sure whether eggs had been laid. However on 11th September, the day I returned, two adults and one well-grown juvenile were in the garden, probably the original pair plus one offspring of this second brood. On September 18th, 20th, 23rd, 24th and 29th, but definitely not in the intervening days, all three arrived in the garden between 6.15 and 6.25 depending on light conditions and, after much toing and froing with the male calling vigorously the entire time, settled to roost, usually close together on one open lateral spray of a small tree, each having a regular position which it adhered to except that the juvenile twice chose a spray some six feet above. Length of time settling down took between six and twenty minutes. On October 1st only the adults roosted there - for the last time though the three birds were seen together on the 3rd and 13th October in the morning and on the 20th in the evening when they appeared about to roost but eventually flew off. Thereafter though the (presumed) pair visited the garden irregularly the three in association were not seen.

## DISCUSSION

1. Because of the difficulty of observation little is known of the length of post-fledging dependence on the parents of most passerine birds. On this occasion not only were the first brood in the nest for three weeks but were being fed at least partially for a further six weeks, though soon after this parental care was entirely broken off. The (presumed) survivor of the second brood was still with the parents eighteen weeks after nest building started though no feeding of it was observed. This compares with a period of about fifteen weeks from start of building to complete independence for the first brood. The technique of aerial sorties

is probably harder to become proficient at than the feeding habits of most passerines, which may help to explain the long parental association.

The conditions under which the two broods were raised were different. When the first brood fledged no significant rain had fallen and e.g. butterflies in the garden were scarce (independent butterfly trapping confirms this). Rain fell with increasing regularity during May and presumably the availability of suitable prey increased (certainly butterflies did). When the second brood fledged it will have been in the middle of the 'deep' rains, when the difficulties of a young bird learning to fend for itself are probably even further increased.

2. In species with obvious sexual dimorphism it seems uncommon for the more conspicuous bird to share equally in brooding on an open nest. The basically brown female was relatively inconspicuous even when the leaves were absent; the black and white male was much more easily seen even when sitting still, and at least this individual advertised himself at the nest by voice and the length of time he took settling down, turning his white breast in various directions. Presumably predators present little problem, (a) because of the almost complete isolation of the tree, thus virtually barring snakes and squirrels, and (b) because of the fierce appearance of the birds - crested and with bright yellow eye and aggressive behaviour.

#### INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS IN NIGERIA

By

D.I.M. Wallace

#### Ostrich *Struthio camelus*

On 9th December 1970 in a forest reserve in the centre of the North-East State, I saw three adult male and one female Ostriches.

This constitutes the only recent record of the species in Nigeria.

#### Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*

On 11th and 12th July 1970, an immature booby was present off the breakwaters of the Lagos Lagoon mouth. During the first day it fished continually in the interface of sea and lagoon, a water area always full of fish. On the second morning it had ceased feeding and probably departed at mid-day.