

Letters to the Editor

Accidental death of a feeding vulture

On 09 November 2016, at 1030 hrs we observed a flock of 145 White-rumped Vultures *Gyps bengalensis*, eight Indian Vultures *G. indicus*, four Red-headed Vultures *Sarcogyps calvus*, and two Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* feeding on a domestic buffalo carcass (a tiger's kill) on Sigur Plateau, Tamil Nadu. We noted the exact location of the carcass for future visits. When we re-visited the carcass at 1530 hrs, an adult White-rumped Vulture was found dead next to the carcass. Its head and upper neck seemed stuck inside the carcass. The vulture probably intended to feed on the visceral organs by inserting its head through the gaps in the vertebral column of the carcass, but its neck got inextricably stuck between two vertebrae, resulting in its death. Such unusual vulture deaths have been recorded in the past too (Allen 1920; Greenwood 1938).

This observation was carried out under a project supported by the Raptor Research and Conservation Foundation for which Tamil Nadu state forest department granted the necessary permissions, and we acknowledge with gratitude their respective roles. We extend our thanks to our field assistants. R. Bomman, K. Manigandan, and B. Vishnu.

References

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Editors' note: The picture that accompanied this note has not been printed, as it requires a strong stomach. Those interested in viewing it may contact the corresponding author directly.

House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* feeding on dressed meat

On 17 February 2017, at 1015 hrs, in the course of fieldwork we observed an unusual feeding behavior of the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* in the meat market at Udhagamandalam, The Nilgiris. Both the parents of a family of sparrows were seen collecting [70, 71], and subsequently feeding pieces of dressed mutton to their nestlings. The nest was built in the deploying nest box of the butcher's shop, and we observed three nestlings in it. The adult pair picked up at least 18 pieces of meat in the shop, and visited their nest 16 times to feed their young during the one hour (1015–1115 hrs) we could observe them. Though the species is primarily granivorous, it is known to be an opportunistic feeder and consumes whatever food is available (Gavett & Wakely 1986; Anderson 2006). Protein-rich food, like insects, is essential for the growth of their nestlings. Anderson (2006) mentions that House Sparrows take advantage of whatever foods are abundant when they are nesting, to feed their young. Red meat contains high levels of biological value protein, important micronutrients,



70. House sparrow male feeding on mutton pieces.



71. House sparrow female feeding on mutton pieces.

Pics: Karthick S.

and a range of fats (Williams *et al.* 2006), and hence might be an ideal replacement for the regular insect diet of sparrow chicks. Despite their well-known catholic taste, we thought this observation worthy of a formal record.

We would like to thank J. Ebanasar, and A. Abinesh of the Department of Zoology & Wildlife Biology, for their help and encouragement.

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