

Observations & discussions

In total 176 House Sparrows were recorded in the township (Table 1). They were found to be mostly associated with shops and houses. 85% of birds were seen associated with shops, 31% with houses, and 27% with vegetation. Shops, which retail grains and groceries in the conventional manner, are a good source of spill-over food materials. Retailing cereals, and other items pre-packed in plastic bags that cut down spill-over almost completely is yet to pick up in the area. The presence of the species was also associated with vegetation, mainly shrubs and small trees (ht < 5 m). Medium-sized plants are used by sparrows for day and night roosting. Hedges around houses, mostly of live shrubs, and weeds, also supported sparrow population (Donald 2006). Sparrows were also seen near eateries since they offer plenty of food items. They were also seen in waste / open grounds to a lesser extent. The birds were relatively in larger numbers near cement-concrete roofs, than tiled or sheet-type roofs. This probably may be an indirect association, since most of the grocery shops, and the like, had cement-concrete roofs. It is also possible that cement-concrete roofs may offer probably more protection than conventional roofs and more nesting sites in the form of ventilations and holes than other type of roofs. Modern types of cement-concrete buildings with fewer openings are rare in the area. Nevertheless, the number of nests we could locate during the survey was low (two numbers), one located in the hole in a cement concrete roofed house, and another in the metallic corrugated shutter hood of a shop. The low number of active nests, for about a hundred pairs, is not a very encouraging trend for the species' survival.

Conclusion

In Arakku the human settlement offered nesting sites as it is a blend of both old and new constructions. Nevertheless, the

number of nests was low. For roosting, house sparrow prefers vegetations like shrubs and small trees (> 5m). Easy availability of food source is also another important reason for association of the species with certain locations. The trend of urbanization, with modern types of buildings and packaging the groceries and cereals in plastic bags leaves fewer chances for the sparrow population in the township.

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On the diet of White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

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On 11 November 2008, at 0830 hrs, I was passing through a trail at Indroda Nature Park, Gandhinagar, (Gujarat), when I came across a very unusual scene. A White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* was holding a full-grown Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia* in its beak on the branch of *Cassia fistula*! The site of this action was on the bank of small stream. The event occurred just before my arrival at the scene as the iora was alive, and was trying to free itself from the strong grip of kingfisher's beak. The kingfisher had a very firm grip on the bird, and killed it within 40–50 seconds, and then flew away from the scene with the bird in its beak.

White-throated Kingfishers have been reported feeding on smaller birds earlier. Roberts & Priddy (1965) noticed a bird attacking a group of White-throated Munias *Lonchura malabarica* near Rawalpinidi. Sen (1944) recorded it feeding on an Oriental White-eye *Zosteropus palpebrosus*. Chiku Vora of Surendranagar informed me (verbally on 10 April 1984) that he had once

observed this kingfisher feeding on a White-browed Fantail-Flycatcher *Rhipidura aureola* at Hanumangala in Gir National Park (Gujarat).

This observation adds the Common Iora to the diet of the White-throated Kingfisher.

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