Charcoal usage in nesting by Red Munia *Amandava amandava*

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Mahajan, A., 2014. Charcoal usage in nesting by Red Munia *Amandava amandava*. *Indian BIRDS*. 9 (5&6): 168.
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Manuscript received on 14 August 2010.

I observed the nesting behaviour of Red Munia *Amandava amandava* from 2007–2010 in a patch of thorn scrub forest on the Ordnance Factory premises in Varangaon Taluk (Jalgaon District, Maharashtra). The nesting season of the Red Munia ranges from September to January in Jalgaon District.

On 15 December 2007, and on 10 January 2010, I examined two abandoned nests and found that both had 15–20 small pieces (5–10 mm) of charcoal. The nests were merely two inches above the ground in the bush and were well hidden. The nests were small, globular structures of grass, and from inside they were lined with soft feathers or silk floss. They were 17 cm long, 11 cm in diameter, and weighed roughly 36 gm. The most probable reason behind the collection and placement of charcoal in the nest by the munia could be to absorb moisture (to manage humidity), and mask the odour of faeces.

A quick literature search revealed that Ali & Ripley (1987), and Khan (2005) did not report such behaviour in the Red Munia. Trigunayat & Navrang (1998) studied the eco-biology of the species but didn't note this behavior either. Usage of charcoal in nest building to mask odours and camouflage eggs was reported in Australian grassfinch species by Forshaw *et al*. (2012), but not yet in a species from the Indian Subcontinent.

The closest nest sanitation behaviour in a species from the Indian Subcontinent was recorded in the Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros birostris,* a cavity nester, where the female seals herself inside a tree cavity, and the male continuously supplies pieces of bark to the inmates, to facilitate removal of excess water from excrement, by absorption and adsorption, probably helping maintain the micro-climate inside the nest (Charde *et al*. 2011).

Further observations are required to ascertain the role of charcoal in munia nests.

Acknowledgements

I thank Raju Kasambe, Project Manager at Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai for his help in procuring references and with writing the manuscript.

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SAVE 3rd meeting updates vulture priorities

Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) is a consortium of thirteen organisations with agreed shared goals to enhance the conservation status of the four critically endangered Asian vulture species through scientifically justified actions. It is chaired by one of the world's leading raptor experts, Professor Ian Newton. The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is one of the core members and the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) has recently become a formal member. There are two sub-committees and the annual meetings generate a summary report.

Fifty delegates from the SAVE Partnership of four South Asian countries, plus Cambodia, and for the first time, Myanmar, converged on Alipurduar in West Bengal for the third annual meeting during 7–9 November 2013. Delegates including many government representatives, all paid a visit to the nearby BNHS/West Bengal Forest Department's Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre at Rajabhat Khawa. The three-day meeting was also formally attended and closed by Mr Hiten Barman, the Honourable Minister-in-Charge, Environment and Forests, West Bengal. One important element of the meeting was the drafting of a 'Blueprint for the Recovery of South Asia's Critically Endangered Gyps Vultures' that details all actions required for each country until 2025 and is now available.

The meeting reported a huge body of progress in all countries represented, and this has now been compiled into a 101-page report that can be freely downloaded from the website resources page www.save-vultures.org along with the Blueprint. The report includes the revised priority actions still required to save these species, which were agreed by the meeting. These call for:

- An immediate ban of diclofenac manufactured for human medicine in vials or ampoules larger than 3 ml.
- An effective system of regulation of veterinary drugs, based upon safety testing on vultures (protocol already agreed for India) initiated and underway for painkillers (NSAIDs) already in and entering veterinary practice.
- Veterinary licenses to be withdrawn for two drugs—ketoprofen and aceclofenac—based on the good existing evidence that they are unsafe for vultures.
- Improve the availability of more effective meloxicam formulations thereby facilitating take up by veterinary practitioners
- Major efforts urgently needed within South Asia to address the immediate and increasing gap in funding for vulture conservation, which now jeopardises the programme.
- Promotion and expansion of network and approach of 'Vulture Safe Zones' across South Asia.
- Maintain and support the existing vulture conservation breeding programmes throughout South Asia.
- Prepare for first soft releases of captive bred vultures into Vulture Safe Zones by 2016.
- Link SAVE activities and meetings to closely support the 'Regional Steering Committee' in order to facilitate the urgent implementation of the 2012 Delhi Regional Agreement.

More details available at: www.save-vultures.org
Contributed by Chris Bowden – SAVE Programme Manager (and RSPB).