

Incubation period of Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile*

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The Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile* is a common resident of Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra. Ali and Ripley (1999) state that its incubation period "undetermined". On the 7th of February 2002 we saw this bird building its nest. The nest was located on a *Nyctanthes arbortristis* tree, at the height of 6.4m.

Two birds were seen engaged in nest building. We could not differentiate between male and female, but many times two birds were observed working together on the nest. They started work early in the morning and around 11:00hrs they almost stopped. Construction activity started again at 16:00hrs and stopped when it became dark.

On the 18th of February the nest was completed. For regular observations we fixed a bamboo ladder under the nest. We started to check the nest every morning and evening. A small mirror on a bent handle was used to look inside the nest.

On the 23rd of February at 07:00hrs the first egg was seen in the nest and on the next day at 08:30hrs there was another.

On the 3rd of March we observed the nest continuously for eight hours and sixteen minutes (09:21hrs to 17:37hrs). During this period, the bird incubated for just four hours and nine minutes. It left the nest 40 times. The longest stretch of time it incubated was for 46 minutes. From 09:21hrs to 10:45hrs and again from 16:56hrs to 17:37hrs incubation lasted only 0.5 to 1 minute. From 10:45hrs to 16:56hrs it was for a longer time.

On the 8th of March at 19:10hrs, a chick was seen inside the nest. On the same day at 20:30hrs we saw that the nest was completely covered by tree ants. With torchlight we observed that the entire nest was full of ants and it was not easy to clear them. We cut the branch on which the nest was attached and took it down to clear all the ants. The newly hatched nestling was dead but fortunately the second egg was intact. With great difficulty we cleared the ants, removing each one of them without disturbing or damaging the nest. It took us about two hours to clear the entire nest of ants. We replaced the egg inside the nest and re-attached the cut branch in its original place with the help of a stick and wire.

We also spread some insecticide on the edge of the branch to prevent another ant attack. We completed the entire work by 22:30hrs.

Early next morning (9 March) one parent was seen inside the nest (incubating?). At 12:00hrs the egg was seen in the nest. At 17:00hrs it had hatched and a chick was visible in the nest.

From next day both parents fed the chick regularly. On the 27th of March at 09:30hrs the young bird fledged. Its parents were seen feeding it near the nest. The chick was last seen on the campus at 11:00hrs.

Our study revealed that the Thick-billed flowerpecker incubates its eggs for 13 days and 18 days is the time taken to fledge. The incubation and fledging periods are calculated as per Skutch (1954), from last egg to last hatching and from last hatching to fledging, respectively.

Acknowledgement

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References

- Ali, Salim and S. D. Ripley, 1999. *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Sri Lanka*. Vol. 10. 2nd ed. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Skutch, A. F., 1954. Incubation and nesting period of Central American birds. *Auk* 62: 8-37.

[Editors' observations: This note raises an ethical issue. An active nest should never be handled even when the aim is to do good. This is a cardinal rule in the birdwatchers' 'code of conduct.' It is not clear whether the ants killed the first chick. Ali & Ripley (1999) actually say, "Frequently builds among the leaf nests of the vicious red ant (*Oecophylla*) without apparent harm, and possibly for protection." We wonder what happened to the ants and what disarray the insecticide caused.]

Recoveries from Newsletter for Birdwatchers – 3.

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N.L.B.W. March 1961: Letters of encouragement continued to come in about our *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* and the proposed Indian Ornithological Society. Wilbur G. Downes, Trinidad Regional Virus Society, wrote, "It will certainly be desirable to have an active group coordinating efforts to preserve Indian bird life, and stimulating the interest of the coming generation in birds." He also sent a brief note about his delight at seeing our birds for the first time, "These novelties are among the commonest birds of India, but evoke a real thrill with each one seen. First noted possibly are the bulbuls in every town and park. What a thrill to see the first one, and then in short order to see three or four species."

Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Williams of the Central Building Research Institute in Roorkee said, "I have just seen No. 1 Newsletter, and hope you will succeed in getting it started. Keep it at a little less technical level than the BNHS Journal, and I am sure you will have plenty of members in due course." I might mention here that Sir Harold played a very important part in our conservation movement. At a meeting convened in Delhi to consider the possibility of establishing an Indian Wildlife Service, at the instance of some members of the BNHS and other Societies, Sir Harold pointed out the impracticability of having two officials of the central government, the territorial D.F.O. of the Forest Department, and