Oriental pied hornbills eating yellow-vented bulbuls

Clarisse Y. D. Tan & Foo Maosheng


Subjects identified by: Foo Maosheng & Kelvin K. P. Lim.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Kent Ridge Campus, Conservatory Drive; 28 May 2019; around 0900 hrs.

Habitat: Urban parkland.

Observer: Clarisse Y. D. Tan, Foo Maosheng and others.

Observation: Two hornbills were observed flapping and hopping about among trees at the back of a concrete building. One of them had a young chick in its beak (Fig. 1; see video 1). Perched on a low branch, this hornbill proceeded to rub its beak with the chick against a horizontal branch (Fig. 2-3; see video 1). It did this about five times. The abrasions seem to dislodge some feathers off the nestling. The hornbill then flew about ten metres to another tree, and continued to rub its beak against another branch about ten times (Fig. 4-7; see video 2) before swallowing the nestling whole (Fig. 8; see video 2). Afterwards the hornbill flew another ten metres or so to an adjacent tree where its partner, perched in a clump of large-leaved bamboo, had just consumed a bird (Fig. 9; see video 3). This second hornbill then reached in among the bamboo foliage and plucked out another bird with its beak (Fig. 10; see video 3). This bird, which seemed to have more feathers, was fluttering about, unable to break free. After some manipulation of the position of the struggling bird in its beak, the second hornbill threw back its head and swallowed the prey whole. The nestlings are believed to be yellow-vented bulbul, and the nest was located inside the clump of bamboo where the second hornbill was perched. The first hornbill was earlier observed to have taken the nestling it ate from the same nest.

Remarks: The featured observation records the raiding of a nest and the predation of at least three yellow-vented bulbul between two adult Oriental pied hornbills. Although the bird taken by the first hornbill look like an unfledged chick, it is not certain if all three victims were in the same growth stage. The second victim of the second bird appeared to be covered in feathers and may be older. From the markings on the face and beak and the shape of the casque, the first hornbill seems to be a female and the second one, a male (see Poonswad et al., 2013: 140). Although they were travelling together, each bird obtained its food individually, and no sharing of food was observed.

Apart from fruit, hornbills also eat insects and small vertebrates. Male Oriental pied hornbills have been recorded providing the following food items to nesting females and chicks: grasshoppers, mantises, leaf and stick insects, spiders, giant African land snail, worms and caterpillars, as well as changeable lizard, fruit bat and sunbird. Brooding mothers have been known to kill and eat weak chicks, and chicks have also been recorded eating smaller dead siblings (Cremades & Ng, 2012: 91).

References:


Video 1: [https://youtu.be/KdZbAYVgwPF](https://youtu.be/KdZbAYVgwPF) by Foo Maosheng.

Video 2: [https://youtu.be/t WiFqErCME](https://youtu.be/t WiFqErCME) by Foo Maosheng.

Images extracted from video 1 (Fig. 1-3) and video 2 (Fig. 4-6) by Foo Maosheng
Fig. 7. Images extracted from video 2 by Foo Maosheng

Fig. 8.

Fig. 9. Hornbill 2 with first victim.

Fig. 10. Hornbill 2 with second victim.

Images extracted from video 3 by Clarisse Y. D. Tan