

Biodiversity Record: Attempted predation of common flameback woodpecker by house crow

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Subjects: Common flameback woodpecker, *Dinopium javanense* (Aves: Piciformes: Picidae);
House crow, *Corvus splendens* (Aves: Passeriformes: Corvidae).

Subjects identified by: Kamalakaran Raja.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Serangoon Central; 15 June 2023; around 1455 hrs.

Habitat: Urban residential area. In carpark surrounded by highrise apartment buildings.

Observer: Kamalakaran Raja.

Observation: Panic calls and fast circling flights of a pair of adult common flameback woodpeckers were noticed in the carpark for a few minutes before the birds came to rest on a short tree nearby. The pair started calling loudly again when a house crow flew from a large African mahogany (*Khaya nyasica*) from across the carpark to the short tree. The crow was carrying a slightly smaller common flameback woodpecker in its beak, and its arrival caused the two adult woodpeckers to scatter, calling loudly (Fig. 1). The crow transferred the motionless woodpecker to its feet and plucked some of its feathers (Fig. 2). However, after a few seconds, the crow dropped the woodpecker and flew off in the same direction as the larger woodpeckers. The birds were not seen again after this, and the dropped woodpecker (Fig. 3) was not retrieved or scavenged in the following days.

Remarks: Hailing primarily from the Indian subcontinent and neighbouring areas (Madge & Burn, 1994), the house crow has spread globally, and is considered to be an invasive species due to the serious impacts introduced populations have on native fauna (Ryall, 1992). The house crows' presence in Singapore originated in Peninsular Malaysia, where they were introduced as a biological control agent for caterpillars back in the late nineteenth century (Willey, 1904). One key factor to their success at spreading is their opportunistic omnivorous diet which includes small vertebrates, grains, fruits, eggs, carrion and human refuse (Kumar & Ojha, 2023).

In Singapore, house crows have been observed robbing nests of black-shouldered kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) for eggs and embryos (Chan & Chan, 2006). They have also been recorded taking nestlings of the spotted dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) (Lee, 2010), black-naped oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*) (Tan et al., 2021) and Malaysian plover (*Charadrius peronii*) (Lim et al., 2021).

The featured observation might be a first for being an attempted predation by a house crow on a fully fledged sub-adult bird and on a common flameback woodpecker. The common flameback is native to Singapore, and commonly seen in gardens and parks. It nests in tree cavities where the female lays a clutch of two to three eggs (Winkler & Christie, 2020). The dead fledgling in the clutches of the crow was most likely the offspring of the two adult woodpeckers that were behaving in a distressed manner. However, it is not known if the crow had actually hunted and killed the young bird, or if it had taken an already deceased bird. It is interesting to note that the crow did not proceed to feed on the dead bird and instead abandoned it, despite not being mobbed by the adult woodpeckers.

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Fig. 1. House crow clutching the motionless fledgling woodpecker with its foot. Fig. 2: Crow plucking feathers off the dead woodpecker's back with its beak and short jerks of its head. Fig. 3: The abandoned fledgling woodpecker was not retrieved or scavenged, and proceeded to decompose over the following week. (Photographs: Kamalakannan Raja).