

Biodiversity Record: A nesting record of red-whiskered bulbul at Kent Ridge

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Subjects: Red-whiskered bulbul, *Pycnonotus jocosus* (Aves: Passeriformes: Pycnonotidae).

Subjects identified by: Yong Chee Keita Sin, Chen Xi Sng, Yen Yi Tan, Mayjean Marie Ines Nieves and Movin Nyanasengaran.

Location and dates: Singapore Island, Lower Kent Ridge Road, National University of Singapore campus, Faculty of Science; 26 April 2024 to 27 May 2024.

Habitat: Urban parkland (Fig. 1).

Observers: Yong Chee Keita Sin (KS), Chen Xi Sng (CS), Yen Yi Tan (YT), Mayjean Marie Ines Nieves (MJ) and Movin Nyanasengaran (MN).

Observations: An account of the nesting of a pair of red-whiskered bulbuls is presented.



Fig. 1. General environment of the nesting location (Photograph by: Chen Xi Sng). Fig. 2. Lateral view of partially completed nest on 26 April 2024 (Photograph by: Mayjean Marie Ines Nieves).

26 April 2024 — KS, CS and MJ discovered a nest in a palm (*Rhapis* sp.) next to a walkway (Fig. 1). Two red-whiskered bulbuls were observed constructing the nest, which was then incomplete (Fig 2). The nest was situated at a height of about 1.4 m off the ground and approximately 20 cm from the edge of the plant. The cup-shaped nest was balanced on a thin forked branch that had fallen into the plant, and weaved around four leaf stalks. Nesting material comprised twigs and dried leaves at the base. No eggs were noted in the nest.

Opportunistic observations carried out thereafter in subsequent weeks are herein summarised.

2 May 2024 — Nest construction was completed. Two eggs were observed by YT and MN. These were pale white/yellowish white and covered with brown spots, which were denser at the obtuse end (Fig 3).

6–10 May 2024 — A single bird was observed incubating the eggs in the nest at different times of the day (and also at night), although its sex could not be determined since the species is sexually monomorphic. While one parent incubated eggs in the nest, the other parent would occasionally be patrolling from a nearby shrub (Figs. 4 & 5).



Fig. 3. Dorsal view of two eggs in the nest on 8 May 2024 (Photograph by: Mayjean Marie Ines Nieves). Fig. 4. Frontal view of one of the red-whiskered bulbuls incubating eggs in the nest on 6 May 2024 (Photograph by: Chen Xi Sng). Fig. 5. Lateral view of one of the parent birds patrolling near the nest on 14 May 2024 (Photograph by: Mayjean Marie Ines Nieves).

13 May 2024 — Two hatchlings were observed in the nest. The eggs should have hatched over the weekend between the evening of 10 May and the morning of 13 May when no observations were conducted. The hatchlings were featherless (Figs 6 & 7).

14–15 May 2024 — Some pins were starting to develop on the chicks which were incubated by an adult (Fig. 8).



Fig. 6. Dorsal view of two featherless hatchlings in the nest, 13 May 2024 (Photograph by: Chen Xi Sng). Fig. 7. Hatchlings still featherless on 14 May 2024 (Photograph by: Mayjean Marie Ines Nieves). Fig. 8. Pin feathers starting to develop on the chicks, 15 May 2024 (Photograph by: Mayjean Marie Ines Nieves).

16 May 2024 — More pins developed on the two chicks, particularly on their wings (Fig. 9).

17 May 2024 — Yet more pins were noted on the two chicks (Figs. 10 & 11).



Fig. 9. Hatchlings with pins developing on their wings, 16 May 2024 (Photograph by: Chen Xi Sng). Fig. 10. Chicks with more pins developing, 17 May 2024 (Photograph by: Mayjean Marie Ines Nieves). Fig. 11. Chicks exhibiting begging behaviour, 17 May 2024 (Photograph by: Mayjean Marie Ines Nieves).

20 May 2024 — The two chicks developed more pins. Although their eyes were still closed, they no longer appeared bald (Fig. 12).

24 May 2024 — The two chicks were fully feathered. Their eyes were fully opened and they seemed alert (Fig. 13).



Fig. 12. Chicks after heavy rain, with further developed pins, 20 May 2024 (Photograph by: Chen Xi Sng). Fig. 13. Both chicks completely feathered, 24 May 2024 (Photograph by: Chen Xi Sng). Fig. 14. Abandoned nest on 6 June 2024, around two weeks post-fledging (Photograph by: Mayjean Marie Ines Nieves).

27 May 2024 — Both chicks were observed fledging from the nest.

The nesting details are summarised as follows — Clutch size: 2. Fledgling size: 2. Egg incubation period: At least 9 days, starting at around 2 May, but possibly several days earlier; and ending at around 10 to 13 May. Fledging period: At least 14 days, beginning around 10 to 13 May, and ending on 27 May.

As red-whiskered bulbuls were not noted on subsequent opportunistic observations at the nest site, the empty nest was collected on 20 June 2024 (Fig. 14) and deposited by YT in the Zoological Reference Collection of the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, at the National University of Singapore, with the catalogue number ZRC 3.36937. The foundation of the cup-shaped nest comprised primarily twigs, interspersed with leaves and grasses, and a piece of paper, on the outer surface. The bottom half of the nest had more leaves and grass compared to the top half. Measurements of the nest, taken by KS, were as follows — outer diameter: 9.35 cm, inner diameter: 6.73 cm, cup depth: 4 cm, cup height: 5.7 cm, weight: 10.3 g.

Remarks: The red-whiskered bulbul is not native to Singapore, although it has always been a locally popular pet bird due to its melodious song. The first local documentation of this species in the wild was of two specimens collected in 1912 (Wang & Hails, 2007). More escapees and (likely) local breeding led to their eventual establishment in Singapore (Gibson-Hill, 1950), with the first nesting record confirmed in 1988 (Burgess, 1988). The species is highly adaptable to urban habitats both in its native and other introduced ranges such as southern Florida, southern California, Hawaii, Hainan, and Taiwan (eBird, 2024; Islam & Williams, 2020). It is presently a common introduced resident in Singapore (Bird Society of Singapore, 2024) that primarily inhabits urban parkland.

With its wide native distribution in the Indian subcontinent, southern China, and mainland Southeast Asia, *Pycnonotus jocosus* is polytypic with around nine subspecies, but the differences between them are subtle (Islam & Williams, 2020). The subspecific identity of the population in Singapore has been assumed to be *Pycnonotus jocosus erythrotis* (see Wang & Hails, 2007), which some authorities have subsumed under *Pycnonotus jocosus emeria* that is distributed from east India to southwest Thailand (Islam & Williams, 2020). We refrain from delving into subspecific identification here in part due to the possibility that the feral Singapore population is derived from multiple sources.

The nesting period of the red-whiskered bulbul in Malaysia and Singapore is reported to be from February to July (Wells, 2007). While our observations are largely congruent with previous works, the nesting ecology of many species in Singapore remain poorly understood. Continued efforts should be invested into understanding the basic life history of the local and regional avifauna.

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