

Biodiversity Record: Coconut lorikeets foraging on flowers of *Palaquium obovatum*

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Subjects: Coconut lorikeet, *Trichoglossus haematodus* (Aves: Psittaciformes: Psittaculidae);
White gutta tree, *Palaquium obovatum* (Angiosperms: Ericales: Sapotaceae).

Subjects identified by: Aireen Phang.

Location, date and time Singapore Island, Singapore Botanic Gardens, next to Heritage Museum (left side of entrance), 29 December 2025, around 1000 hrs and 1230 hrs.

Habitat: Urban parkland.

Observers: Aireen Phang (1000 hrs and 1230 hrs), Matti A. Niissalo (1000 hrs), Timothy Utteridge (1230 hrs).

Observation: At approximately 1000 hrs, a single coconut lorikeet was observed foraging on the inflorescences of a *Palaquium obovatum* tree (Fig. 1). The bird was active in the upper canopy, approximately 8–10 m above the ground. It was systematically probing open flowers with its bill. Notably, the corollas remained intact and were neither ingested nor destroyed during the feeding process. This is consistent with the lorikeet's specialised feeding behaviour of utilising its brush-tipped tongue to harvest nectar. Subsequently, around 1230 hrs, three additional coconut lorikeet individuals visited the same tree and exhibited identical foraging behaviour on the floral clusters.



Fig. 1. Coconut lorikeet moving quickly amongst high branches containing inflorescences, feeding on the nectar of open flowers (Photograph by: Matti A. Niissalo).

Remarks: The host tree, *Palaquium obovatum* is a native species with a conservation status of Vulnerable in Singapore (Lindsay et al., 2022). Its flowers are known to exhibit chiropterophilous (bat-pollinated) traits, including nocturnal anthesis and a pungent, fermented scent. A recent study in the Singapore Botanic Gardens confirmed the lesser dog-faced fruit bat (*Cynopterus brachyotis*) as a key flower visitor and potential pollinator of this species (Phang, 2023).

While other nectarivorous birds such as the blue-crowned hanging parrot (*Loriculus galgulus*) and the long-billed spiderhunter (*Arachnothera robusta*) have been recorded visiting *Palaquium* inflorescences in Sarawak (Momose et al., 1998), the present observation represents the first record of *Trichoglossus haematodus* feeding on flowers of *Palaquium obovatum*.

The lorikeets were observed harvesting nectar without damaging the floral structure. This non-destructive feeding is enabled by the specialised lingual papillae at the tip of the tongue, which form a ‘brush’ that wicks up nectar through capillary action (Churchill & Christensen, 1970; Richardson & Wooller, 1990). This specialisation allows the lorikeets to exploit the copious nectar produced by *Palaquium* flowers, which often remain available into the early daylight hours following nocturnal anthesis.

The coconut lorikeet is widely distributed in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (BirdLife International, 2018). In Singapore, it is an introduced species with established breeding populations (Yong et al., 2024). As noted by Neo (2012), the ecological impacts of introduced parrots in Singapore remain poorly documented. Observations such as this record may aid the understanding of ecosystem effects of alien species, particularly regarding their potential role as opportunistic pollinators or competitors for nectar resources with native fauna.

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