

Birds feeding on waringin figs in West Coast Park

Subjects: Waringin or weeping fig, *Ficus benjamina* (Magnoliophyta: Rosales: Moraceae); Pink-necked green pigeon, *Treron vernans* (Aves: Columbiformes: Columbidae); Asian koel, *Eudynamys scolopaceus* (Aves: Cuculiformes: Cuculidae); Javan myna, *Acridotheres javanicus* (Aves: Passeriformes: Sturnidae); Asian glossy starling, *Aplonis panayensis* (Aves: Passeriformes: Sturnidae); Black-naped oriole, *Oriolus chinensis* (Aves: Passeriformes: Oriolidae); Coppersmith barbet, *Megalaima haemacephala* (Aves: Piciformes: Megalaimidae).

Subjects identified by: Contributor & Jeremy W. L. Yeo.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, West Coast Park; 7 April 2016, 0715-0745 hrs.

Habitat: Urban parkland.

Observer: Contributor.

Observation: A waringin tree (about 10-15 m tall) laden with ripe orange coloured figs, had attracted many birds which the contributor observed for about a half-hour. Pink-necked green pigeons (Figs. 1 & 2) and Asian glossy starlings (Fig. 3) were first seen feeding on the figs. They formed the majority of the birds in the tree. Subsequently, two male (Fig. 4) and one female (Fig. 5) Asian koel hopped over from an adjacent non-fig tree, and started to feed and call. A family group of about four black-naped orioles consisting of adults (Fig. 6) and juveniles (Fig. 7) joined in the feast. Only one coppersmith barbet (Fig. 8) was sighted in the tree. Towards the later part of the observation, as the sky became brighter, Javan mynas (Fig. 9) arrived and started feeding. All the birds were observed to swallow the figs whole, and the ground below the tree was covered with bird droppings with intact fig seeds.

Remarks: The waringin is a strangling fig that grows commonly on wayside trees. It is identified by its small, elliptical, smooth, sharp-tipped leaves and ripe figs that are orange-coloured and about 1 cm in diameter (Ng et al., 2005: 106-107). All the birds featured here are common species of urban environments (Yong et al., 2016). As the waringin strangles mature trees and damages buildings by growing out of cracks on concrete walls, it is seen as a destructive plant. The present observation, however, shows that it does seem to have a role in supporting bird diversity in urban landscapes.

References:

- Ng, A. B. C., A. Ng, B. Lee, A. L. Chuah, S. G. Goh, J. T. K. Lai, G. C. Tan & V. D'Rozario, 2005. *A Guide to the Fabulous Figs of Singapore*. Singapore Science Centre. 152 pp.
- Yong D. L., K. C. Lim & T. K. Lee, 2016. *A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of Singapore*. 2nd edition. John Beaufoy Publishing, United Kingdom. 176 pp.

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Fig. 1. Male pink-necked green pigeon.



Fig. 2. Sub-adult pink-necked green pigeon.



Fig. 3. Asian glossy starling.



Fig. 4. Male Asian koel.



Fig. 5. Female Asian koel.



Fig. 6. Adult black-naped oriole.

Photographs by Tan Heok Hui



Fig. 7. Juvenile black-naped oriole.



Fig. 8. Coppersmith barbet.



Fig. 9. Javan myna with a fig in its bill.

Photographs by Tan Heok Hui