

Nesting behavior of Sri Lanka Yellow-eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus penicillatus*) in the Knuckles massif of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Sri Lanka Yellow-eared Bulbul (SLYEB) (*Pycnonotus penicillatus*) is an endemic bird restricted to the wet zone highlands of Sri Lanka. The study was carried out from June to November 2017 in the Northern flank of the Knuckles mountain range at high altitude to examine the nesting behavior of the SLYEB. Daily observations and counts of the birds were made from 06:00h to 18:00 h in selected habitats ranging in elevation from 850-1250 m along 2 km line transects. Nests were observed from July to October. Data on various breeding parameters and fruiting phenology of plants were collected. Scan sampling and focal animal sampling techniques were used to gather behavioural data. The nests were checked every two day intervals during the incubation period and at weekly intervals from the onset of chicks emerged, until they left their nests. Total of seven nests were recorded during the study period. All nests were recorded in high elevation range forests. Breeding occurred during the fruiting season. Fruits of *Ilex knuckelensis* was one of the most preferred fruit tree species (70% consumed) of SLYEB. The emergence of hatchlings of the bird coincided within the fruit ripening period of this plant. Nest was open-cups, located 2-5 m from the ground. Majority of the nests (>57%; n = 4) were built on *Ilex knuckelensis* plants and *Davidsea attenuata* bushes at high elevations (above 1000 m). Both male and female participated in nest building and the completion of nest construction ranged 5 – 8 days (6.58 ± 1.07 days, n=7). Nest consists of leaves of *Davidsea attenuata* (50%) and *Elettaria cardamomum* (30%) and some bryophytes and other material (20%). The clutch size of SLYEBs ranged from 1 to 2 (1.6 ± 0.5). Average incubation period was 12.86 ± 0.86 days (range: 11-14 days, n = 7). Average breeding season lasted for thirty days. Unnecessary noises due to visitors, using cameras with flashes were the main reasons for leaving the nest during the incubation. Suitable sites for nest constructions are reducing due to habitat loss. These were observed as the main threats for the breeding of SLYEB in the region.

Keywords: *Breeding, Ilex knuckelensis, Knuckles, Sri Lanka, Yellow-Eared Bulbul*

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