

***Piper aduncum* in the Diet of Montane Barbet Nestlings**

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Adult barbet species are well documented to feed on a variety of fruit, especially *Ficus* species. However, documentation of fruit in the diet of barbet nestlings is lacking for some species.

Regarding the diet of the Black-browed Barbet *Psilopogon oorti*, Short and colleagues (2020a) state "Little known. Fruits comprise most of its diet, takes insects, mainly when breeding, but little information available." On the diet of the Fire-tufted Barbet *Psilopogon pyrolophus*, Short and colleagues (2020b) suggest that the diet for nestling is animal prey "which shifted to all-fruit diet week post-fledging".

From July to August 2025, I had the privilege to observe both the Black-browed and Fire-tufted Barbets nesting at Frasers Hill, Pahang, Malaysia. In both montane species I observed the adults bringing *Piper aduncum* fruit to feed nestlings (Plate 1).



Plate 1: Adult Fire-tufted Barbet (left) (July 2025) and Black-browed Barbet (August 2025) bringing *Piper aduncum* fruit to feed nestlings, Frasers Hill, Pahang, Malaysia.

Piper aduncum (Tree Pepper or Spiked Pepper) is native to the forests of Central and South America. It has been introduced to Malaysia and is now widely distributed. It is an evergreen shrub with a spreading crown and can grow from two to eight metres tall (Tropical Plants Database 2025). Its fruit is a small drupe with black seeds and said to be very sweet with a peppery flavour, and is spread by bats and birds. Locally the Orange-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum trigonostigma*, Crimson-breasted Flowerpecker *Prionochilus percussus*, Yellow-vented Flowerpecker *Pachyglossa chrysorrhea* and Long-tailed Sibia *Heterophasia picaoides* are known to feed on the fruit (Amar-Singh HSS 2010; Amar-Singh HSS 2022).

I also observed the Black-browed Barbet bring a number of other items to feed nestlings (Plate 2). These include a snail, a winged insect and two types of *Ficus* fruit.

These observations suggest that fruit comprises some of the diet of nestlings in these montane barbets, possibly when closer to fledging.



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Plate 1: Black-browed Barbet bringing fruit and animal prey items to feed nestlings, Frasers Hill, Pahang, Malaysia, August 2025.

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