Discovery of a Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker roosting site in an urban environment

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Woodpeckers excavate holes for nesting and roosting (Short 1982). Short (1982) states that "*holes generally provide a rather safe roosting site and a somewhat stable environment (the roosting or nesting birds are less susceptible to rain and other weather effects than are birds in the open, and the temperature and humidity fluctuate less in the hole)*". "*Until the young are several months old and can find or excavate a roosting hole, they roost in the open, where they are subject to predation*".

There is considerable work and publications from temperate regions on the use of holes to roost by woodpeckers; the colder weather may necessitate this (Birdfact 2023). However, we have little information on the use of holes for roosting by woodpeckers in our region.

It is to my pleasant surprise that I discovered a Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Yungipicus canicapillus* routinely using a hole in a tree as a night roost (Plate 1).



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Plate 1: Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker roosting in a tree hollow, Petaling District of Selangor, Malaysia, 1758, 30 November 2024.

The Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker was observed for a total of 3 consecutive days at the Petaling District of Selangor, Malaysia from the 30 November to 02 December 2024. The tree used was a dead McArthur's Palm *Ptychosperma macarthurii*, located right outside a row of terrace houses. The tree stump was hardly a meter away from the gate of a house. This specific opening is approximately three meters high, almost where the stump ends.

What is interesting to me is the fact that this individual does follow a routine, where for 3 days straight it arrived at approximately 6 pm. I observed that the woodpecker did not immediately enter the hole, instead, it engaged in a drumming ritual where it started at the middle of the tree stump, slowly creeping upwards while drumming for a few seconds. Besides this, I did not notice it call during the entire period of observation. In between drumming, the bird was thought to be on high alert, as it was scanning its surroundings presumably for threats (Plate 2). Despite this, it did appear to be unperturbed by my presence. As a result, I was able to observe it from a close distance.



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Plate 2: Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker seemingly on high alert before entering roosting hole, Petaling District of Selangor, Malaysia, 01 December 2024.

During the three-day observation period, only one bird used the roost each evening. However, it was not possible to determine if it was the same bird on each occasion. The bird was not observed leaving the hole, but it was always empty when I checked it the subsequent morning. No nesting activities were observed.

What is uncertain is whether this hole was excavated by this individual or another. Our bird watching experience has taught us about the competition for nesting holes among some species of birds, mammals and reptiles. Hence, it is quite possible that this woodpecker re-used the hole made by another species for roosting.

The night roost of woodpeckers requires further study particularly in our region. In the past, I have only seen night-roosting Black-and-Yellow Broadbills *Eurylaimus ochromalus* and Rufous-backed Dwarf-Kingfishers *Ceyx rufidorsa* on tree branches. I truly wonder where do they all take refuge at night. As shown here, I believe it could be closer to home than we think!

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