

Bird Trees Series:

***Debregeasia longifolia* – A Highland Wonder**

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Debregeasia longifolia, often called Orange Wild Rhea, is a small 2-7 metres tree (Gardner *et al.*, 2018) that is found predominantly in the montane regions. It has a wide distribution in Asia and Southeast Asia (Tropical Plants Database 2025), and commonly found on the hill stations of Peninsular Malaysia and the montane regions of Borneo. Leaves are narrow and long with scattered hairs above. The plant is best identified when it fruits, twice a year, when it produces copious amounts of reddish or yellowish orange fruit of 1cm dense clusters of spheres (Gardner *et al.*, 2018) (Plate 1). The raw fruits are said to be 'pleasantly sweet' and safe for human consumption (Tropical Plants Database 2025). The local Dusun name is Tonduramai.



Plate 1: *Debregeasia longifolia* fruiting at Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia, June 2025 (left) and at Cameron Highlands, Pahang, Malaysia, December 2011 with a female Fire-breasted Flowerpecker feeding (right).

Many bird species feed on the fruit of *Debregeasia longifolia*, possibly aiding in its propagation. In recent years there has been a proliferation of this plant in Cameron Highlands, Pahang, Malaysia.

Bird species we have personally observed feeding on *Debregeasia longifolia* include (Plate 2 & 3):

1. Golden-throated Barbet *Psilopogon franklinii*
2. Golden-naped Barbet *Psilopogon pulcherrimus*
3. Fire-tufted Barbet *Psilopogon pyrolophus*
4. Bornean Treepie *Dendrocitta cinerascens*
5. Mountain Bulbul *Ixos mcclellandii*
6. Bornean Bulbul *Rubigula montis*
7. Penan Bulbul *Alophoixus ruficrissus*
8. Pale-faced Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucops*

9. Hume's White-eye *Zosterops auriventer*
10. Black-capped White-eye *Zosterops atricapilla*
11. Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush *Pterorhinus mitratus*
12. Chestnut-hooded Laughingthrush *Pterorhinus treacheri*
13. Silver-eared Mesia *Leiothrix argenteauris*
14. Blue-winged Minla *Actinodura cyanouroptera*
15. Siberian Thrush *Geokichla sibirica*
16. Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*
17. Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*
18. Indigo Flycatcher *Eumyias indigo*
19. Mugimaki Flycatcher *Ficedula mugimaki*
20. Little Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula westermanni*
21. Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus*



Plate 2: Bornean Treepie (left) and Golden-naped Barbet feeding on the fruit of *Debregeasia longifolia* at Gunung Alab, June 2025.

Many birdwatchers and photographers may have seen other bird species feeding on this fruit. As most birdwatchers and photographers do not appear to be aware of the plant's name, an online search for other species feeding on this plant did not offer any data. We did however find images posted of Plain Flowerpecker *Dicaeum minullum* feeding in the fruit. We hope that this article assists birdwatchers and photographers to identify and report the feeding of birds on this plant in eBird.

The owner of the bird viewing station at Gunung Alab, Sabah, Malaysia, has taken advantage of this tree's popularity with birds and planted/encouraged their growth at the site, attracting many birds.



Plate 3: Clockwise from top left Golden-throated Barbet, Blue-winged Minla, Mountain Bulbul & Fire-breasted Flowerpecker (male) feeding on the fruit of *Debregeasia longifolia* at Cameron Highlands, Malaysia, December 2011.

Note that while we have seen birds consuming the fruit they may also be hunting for insects attracted to the fruit. For example, treehoppers are sap-feeding insects belonging to the family *Membracidae*. While treehoppers primarily feed on the phloem of a wide range of host plants, they may occasionally be observed on *Debregeasia longifolia*, which they likely utilise as a secondary or opportunistic host.

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References

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