**Whiskered Treeswift *Hemiprocne comata* sharing feeding of Grey-rumped Treeswift *H. longipennis* nestling with parents.**

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In March 2023, a pair of Grey-rumped Treeswifts *Hemiprocne longipennis* were sighted nesting in Pahang. What was unusual about this nest was that an individual of another species, Whiskered Treeswift *H. comata*, assisted in the feeding of the Grey-rumped Treeswift chick.

**Nesting Site**

The Grey-rumped Treeswift nesting occurred on a bare branchlet of a dried tree (tree species unknown) at Bukit Tinggi, Pahang, Malaysia. The tree was located on the lower part of a hill slope, at a distance of about 8 m from the road, and was observed at eye-level. The nest was approximately 10 m from the ground, in a tree that was 20 m tall.

**Initial Parental Care by Grey-rumped Treeswifts**

The date the egg was laid is uncertain. The egg hatched on 23 March 2023 (see Plate 1 & 2). A large number of birdwatchers and photographers were present almost daily to observe and record the progress of the nest. For the first three weeks after hatching, the nestling was fed by both Grey-rumped Treeswift parents (see Plate 3 & 4).


Plate 1: Grey-rumped Treeswift at nest with egg on 23 March 2023


Plate 2: Egg hatching event, 23 March 2023


Plate 4: Adult Grey-rumped Treeswift feeding chick on 31 March 2023


Plate 3: Adult Grey-rumped Treeswift at nest with juvenile on 2 April 2023

**Cross-species (Interspecific) Feeding**

On 16 April 2023, 25 days after the egg hatched, a male Whiskered Treeswift joined in the routine feeding (see Plate 5). When the Whiskered Treeswift first perched near the chick to feed it, the Grey-rumped Treeswifts chased it away. After the second attempt at feeding the chick by the Whiskered Treeswift, the Grey-rumped Treeswifts accepted the activity and the three adults shared feeding duties. The chick accepted the feeds from the Whiskered Treeswift without any untoward reaction. On one occasion, observers recorded the male and female Grey-rumped Treeswifts and the Whiskered Treeswift feeding the chick consecutively at an interval of 1-2 seconds, one after another.


Plate 5: Whiskered Treeswift feeding juvenile Grey-rumped Treeswift

From the start of the cross-species feeding, bird photographers recorded that the Whiskered Treeswift fed the juvenile almost daily, until the second last feeding before the chick fledged on 23 April 2023 at approximately 0915. Only one male Whiskered Treeswift was involved. Other bird species that approached the nest site, for example an Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*, were chased away.

**Other Relevant Observations**

When the chick's feathers were fully formed, the parents started to leave it on its own except during feeding time. Sometime during the fourth week, the chick was observed calling when the parents were slower than usual to turn up with feeds. When the male Whiskered Treeswift started to feed the chick, a female Whiskered Treeswift was seen perched at another dried tree close-by on numerous occasions (photographic evidence).

There is limited data on the fledging period in Grey-rumped Treeswifts. In this observation, the period from hatchling to fledgling was 31 days. It should be noted that perhaps the additional feedings helped to quicken the chick's growth and hasten fledging.

There is no data on any interaction between the fledged juvenile Grey-rumped Treeswift and the Whiskered Treeswift.

**Discussion**

Cross-species or interspecific feeding is a difficult occurrence to explain. Skutch (1961) first discussed 'nest helpers' and since that time many bird species have been identified to participate in cooperative breeding. While intraspecific feeding (helpers within the same species) is more common, interspecific feeding (helpers from another species) is less often observed.

Shy (1982) in a review on interspecific feeding among birds has suggested several situations that may predispose to cross-species feeding. Her classification includes:

- Bird raised in a mixed clutch
- Original nest and brood of bird destroyed (nesting failure)
- Nests in very close proximity
- Calling of young birds stimulates behaviour
- Orphaned birds adopted temporarily or permanently
- Male bird feeding another species while mate incubated
- Feeding bird is mateless and finds a mateless bird at nest
- Miscellaneous: none of the above reasons were evident.

We are unsure of the reason in this observation but one possibility is nesting failure by the Whiskered Treeswift and hence the 'desire' to continue feeding a juvenile. It is interesting however that it was a male Whiskered Treeswift that was occupied in the feeding activities. Another possibility is that the calls of the Grey-rumped Treeswift chick stimulated the parental compulsion of the male Whiskered Treeswift to help feed the chick.

**References**

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