

Aberrant Nesting Site and Nest Structure of the Malaysian Pied-Fantail

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I have found the Malaysian Pied-Fantail *Rhipidura javanica* to be resilient and adaptive birds when it comes to nesting. Over the years I have seen numerous nests, many in our garden. In recent years we had an influx of Common Treeshrew *Tupaia glis* that visit our wild urban garden daily and this has disrupted nesting birds. The Treeshrews have taken the eggs of a number of bird species and our resident pair of Malaysian Pied-Fantails have lost a number of nests. They struggled at first but adapted by using very thin structures, like a single stand of a very thin hanging bamboo, to build nests and hence overcame the threat.

On 22 July 2024 I was at the outskirts of Ipoh City, Perak, Malaysia, at a location where a number of ex-mining pools are used for fish farming; the surrounding land used as orchards. There are quite a number of Malaysian Pied-Fantail to be found here, as flies around. I spotted a pair nesting in a very unusual way - on the top of a wooden stake that had been placed in the waters of an ex-mining pool. The wooden stake was about one meter out of the water and about one meter away from land. The nest was built on a small ledge near the top (Plate 1).



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Plate 1: Malaysian Pied-Fantail nesting on a wooden stake, 22 July 2024, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

The bird appeared to be incubating, so I kept my distance and decided to leave. Just at that moment the nesting partner arrived with more nesting material. They changed places and further nest construction occurred (Plate 2).



Plate 2: Unusual nest building by Malaysian Pied-Fantail, 22 July 2024, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

I decided to leave the nest site. I returned 45 min later as I saw from afar that they were not at the nest. Plate 3 shows the nest without the adults. There were no eggs that I could see, but direct views into the nest are limited. The nest was made mainly of dried grass fibre, anchored to the wood using spider silk.



Plate 3: Closer view of unusual nest location and structure, 22 July 2024, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

Many of us would be familiar with the usual nest of the Malaysian Pied-Fantail. It is a small, well woven cup of dead grasses, held together with spider silk and often with a small hanging 'tail'. The nest is usually built in trees, in the fork of a branch or a leaning branch. I have seen Malaysian Pied-Fantails build a nest over water before (Amar-Singh HSS 2015) and it has been reported in literature (Wells 2007), so that was not unexpected. But the site of this nest was very unusual, resting on the ledge of a piece of wood. In addition, the nest is more like that of

a Bulbul rather than the tight cup of a Flycatcher. I was concerned that the nest was very open to the elements and visible. Fortunately, we do not have any Brown Shrikes around at this time but human nuisance predators are likely. I considered reasons for this aberrant nesting site:

1. It could be that there are many arboreal mammalian threats in the area, hence building over water was for safety. The location being a good choice and nest structure appropriate for the site. This is the most likely explanation. I have observed a previous nest over water at the same site (Amar-Singh HSS 2015).
2. Could the birds have learned, adapted to change their nest structure. i.e. copied other birds? This is another possibility but highly unlikely.

A brief follow-up visit on 25 July 2024, with less than 5 minutes spent near the nest, showed both adults still actively building the nest. The nest was deeper and more robust and birds were seen bringing spider webs to strengthen the structure (Plate 4).



Plate 4: Nest construction near completed, 25 July 2024, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

A final visit on 05 August 2024 sadly showed that the nest had been completely destroyed. Whether this was a result of bad storms, human or animal interferences is uncertain.

References

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