

Bird Tree Series:

Birds Relationships to the *Pipturus argenteus*

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Pipturus argenteus is a tree native to part of tropical Asia (Peninsular Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines), New Guinea, northern Australia and the Pacific Islands (Fern 2014; Kew 2023). It is called Australian Mulberry, Native Mulberry or White Nettle; it belongs to the Urticaceae family (nettle family, non-stinging). It is a small tree ranging in height between six to eight meters; often found at the forest edge or at open secondary growth. The lower half of leaf margins are serrated and the under surface of the leaves is silvery ('*argenteus*' means silver-coloured in Latin).

The fruits are in clusters, measure four to six mm in diameter and are a white when ripe and sticky, speckled with dark seed spots (see Plate 1); they are edible (Simpson 2019). The tree produces crops of fruit throughout the year.

The fruits attract many species of birds as well as squirrels and monkeys. Larger birds will swallow the ripe fruit whole. Smaller birds handle the sticky fruit by snatching a fruit and then placing it on a horizontal branch to be eaten piece-meal. Asian Emerald Doves will feed on fallen fruit as well take fruit on trees. Pin-striped Tit-babblers can devouring four to five fruits in 60 seconds. Many birds, like the Blue Rock-thrush are territorial over the fruit, chasing away other Thrushes.



Plate 1: A close up of the *Pipturus argenteus* fruit

Birds that have been observed feeding on the fruit of *Pipturus argenteus* include (see Plate 2) (Amar-Singh HSS 2017a; Amar-Singh HSS 2017b; Chiu-San Lee 2012; Wee-Yeow Chin 2017):

1. Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier*
2. Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus brunneus*
3. Stripe-throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus finlaysoni*
4. Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*
5. Spectacled Bulbul *Rubigula erythrophthalmos*
6. Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*
7. Pink-necked Green-Pigeon *Treron vernans*
8. Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*
9. Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*
10. Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius*
11. Blue Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*
12. Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*
13. Asian Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*

14. Pin-striped Tit-Babbler *Mixornis gularis*
15. Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus*
16. Javan Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*
17. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*
18. Coppersmith Barbet *Psilopogon haemacephalus*
19. Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*
20. Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*
21. Oriental Pied-Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*
22. Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*
23. Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*



Plate 2: Clockwise from top: Pin-striped Tit-Babbler, Coppersmith Barbet, Blue Rock-Thrush, Common Iora feeding on the fruit of the *Pipturus argenteus*

An online image search for "*Pipturus argenteus*" and "bird" identified a number of other species that feed on the nectar, including (Frost 2021; van Balen 2020; van Balen 2021):

1. Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus moluccanus*
2. Blue-faced Honeyeater *Entomyzon cyanotis*
3. Rennell White-eye *Zosterops rennellianus*
4. Bare-eyed White-eye *Zosterops superciliosus*

It is possible that more species could be added to this list, especially when the tree is located at the forest fringe.

Pipturus argenteus is an excellent tree to plant in parks and gardens to attract birds as a food source and enhance urban bird watching. This tree is also a welcoming host for many butterfly

species. The tree is easy to cultivate, fast-growing, prefers full sun, moist conditions and responds well to pruning.

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