

Short Note

Interspecific Feeding of a White-Eye Fledgling by a Little Spiderhunter

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Interspecific feeding among birds is uncommon and unusual in that it confers no obvious selective advantage to the feeder. Most reported examples of this behaviour come from the Americas or Europe (Skutch 1961, Shy 1982). Here I report on an adult Little Spiderhunter (*Arachnothera longirostra*) feeding a fledgling White-eye (*Zosterops* sp.) in Thailand.

On 21 April 2004 I was watching a pair of White-eyes (presumably *Z. everetti*, species under review, Pierce and Round, in prep.) feeding their dependent fledgling in the understorey of evergreen forest at Mo-singto, Khao Yai National Park, NE Thailand (14° 26' N, 101° 22' E, 750 m elevation). The Little Spiderhunter came and perched next to the begging fledgling White-eye. The spiderhunter put its tongue in and out of the white-eye's mouth in a rapid manner presumably transferring nectar. Probably the same individual repeated this behaviour less than a minute later. At this time two adult white-eyes were perched within 2 m of their young, holding food in their bills, yet neither tried to disturb the spiderhunter. After the spiderhunter left following its second feeding bout the adult white-eyes continued to feed the fledgling as before. The adult white-eyes obviously did not see the spiderhunter as a threat to their offspring whereas when I had caught the fledgling, in order to colour ring it, less than an hour earlier they had been extremely distressed, alarm-calling and flying around very close to me in an agitated manner.

Skutch (1961) gave several possible reasons for interspecific helping of young birds including a birds' natural and presumably very strong instinct to feed food-begging young. He also thought it probable that this behaviour may occur

among many unrelated species of a similar size but it has never evolved into any regular mutual partnership as it does not increase reproductive success. One way in which it could be advantageous is when the feeder is an immature bird and it gains experience in feeding young (Shy 1982). In an extensive review of interspecific feeding among birds, Shy (1982) found no documented records of this behaviour in Asia and I have been unable to find any since then. This is most likely due to a paucity of observations but does, however, emphasise the unusualness of this trait. In this instance it was unclear why the spiderhunter should be feeding the fledgling white-eye. It may have mistook the fledgling for one of its own, or may have recently lost its own young and was just responding automatically to the begging of a nearby fledgling.

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