

Association between Hair-crested Drongo and Greater Yellowname in the subtropical forests of Kalimpong, India

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Abstract This study reports the first ever observation of possible foraging interactions between Hair-crested Drongo (*Dicrurus hottentottus*) and Greater Yellowname (*Chrysophlegma flavinucha*) in the subtropical forests of Kalimpong, India. The observations revealed that the drongo actively followed the woodpecker a considerable number of times, when it changed trees. The findings suggest that the Hair-crested Drongo benefits from the association probably by foraging on invertebrates flushed by the woodpecker's movements. The Greater Yellowname's foraging activities likely provide the drongo with increased feeding opportunities. This study highlights the importance of mixed-species foraging flocks and warrants further research to understand the benefits of such bird associations.

Keywords: mixed-species foraging flock, *Dicrurus hottentottus*, *Chrysophlegma flavinucha*, species interaction

Összefoglalás A tanulmány az ékesdrongó (*Dicrurus hottentottus*) és a nagy sárgatarkójú harkály (*Chrysophlegma flavinucha*) közötti lehetséges táplálkozási kölcsönhatásokról számol be Kalimpong, India szubtrópusi erdejében. A megfigyelések szerint a drongó gyakran követi a harkályt, amikor az fát vált. Az ékesdrongó valószínűleg azáltal profitál a kapcsolatból, hogy a harkály mozgása által felriasztott gerinctelen állatokkal táplálkozik. A nagy sárgatarkójú harkály táplálkozási tevékenysége valószínűleg megnövekedett táplálkozási lehetőségeket biztosít a drongónak. A tanulmány kiemeli a vegyes fajú táplálkozási csapatok fontosságát, és további kutatásokat indokol annak megértéséhez, hogy az ilyen kapcsolatok milyen előnyökkel járnak a fajok számára.

Kulcsszavak: vegyes fajú táplálkozó csapat, *Dicrurus hottentottus*, *Chrysophlegma flavinucha*, fajok kölcsönhatása

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Mixed-species flocks of birds, commonly found in forest habitats, involve species with diverse roles and foraging strategies. Drongos (family Dicruridae, order Passeriformes) are known to associate with mixed-species bird flocks, often benefiting from the foraging activities of other birds. In India, the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dissemerus paradiseus*) has been found in flocks with Greater Yellownames (*Chrysophlegma flavinucha*) (Bates 1952), and the Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) frequently associates with Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) (Veena & Lokesha 1993). In addition, Crested Drongos (*D. forficatus*) attend mixed-species foraging flocks in Madagascar (Hino 1998). Interactions between Greater Racket-tailed Drongo and woodpeckers have been reported from Malaysia (Styring & Ickes 2001). They may join these flocks for increased foraging success, either

by catching insects disturbed by other birds (Satischandra *et al.* 2007) or by engaging in kleptoparasitism i.e. stealing food from other flock members (Brockmann & Barnard 1979, Flower & Gribble 2012). However, certain instances reveal that woodpeckers may also benefit from participation in mixed-species flocks (Limparungpatthanakij *et al.* 2019).

Hair-crested Drongos (*D. hottentottus*) are medium-sized insectivorous birds. This bird is characterized by glimmering blue iridescence on its wings, breast, and neck, a distinctive triangular tail with flaring tips curling out sideways, and long, thin, hair-like feathers on its forehead (Rocamora *et al.* 2023). The species is distributed across eastern South Asia, southern and eastern East Asia, and Southeast Asia (BirdLife International 2023) and is mainly found in subtropical forests or tropical moist lowlands (Sun *et al.* 2019).

Greater Yellownape is a medium-sized woodpecker (family Picidae, order Piciformes), characterized by its vibrant plumage, featuring a moss-green back, bright yellow nape, and powerful pale bill, while its distinctive gray lower parts set it apart from the smaller Lesser Yellownape (*Picus chlorolophus*). These birds are insectivorous, primarily feeding on ants, termites, and insect larvae and they tend to forage on the trunks and branches of trees ranging from small to large (BirdLife International 2018, Winkler & Christie 2020).

While studying the natural landscape in the forest of Kalimpong (27.06° N, 88.47° E) during the month of May, 2018, I initially identified a Greater Yellownape (*Figure 1*) at around seven o'clock in the morning by its distinctive pecking sound. Upon closer observation, I had noticed a Hair-crested Drongo (*Figure 2*) in the vicinity, which actively followed the



Figure 1. Greater Yellownape (*Chrysophlegma flavinucha*)

1. ábra Nagy sárgatarkójú harkály (*Chrysophlegma flavinucha*)



Figure 2. Hair-crested Drongo (*Dicrurus hottentottus*)
2. ábra Ékes drongó (*Dicrurus hottentottus*)

woodpecker. When the woodpecker moved to another tree, it was almost always followed by the Hair-crested Drongo. Specifically, out of 17 instances of the woodpecker changing trees, the drongo followed 14 times, representing 82.3% of the observations. This frequent association suggests a potential foraging interaction between the two species.

Drongos are fiercely aggressive birds known for mobbing larger birds (Nash & Nash 1985, Nijman 2004), occasionally preying on smaller avian species (Sridharan & Sivasubramanian 1987, Jayson & Ramachandran 1994), and frequently stealing food from other birds (Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1997). However, no such aggressive behaviour was observed in the above foraging interaction.

The observations suggest that Hair-crested Drongos frequently associate with Greater Yellownapes at the subtropical forest of Kalimpong, India. Like other drongos, Hair-crested Drongos are frequent followers, often foraging on invertebrates flushed by the movements of other animals (Styring & Ickes 2001). Sallying species like drongos benefit from capturing prey that is flushed out by species with more active foraging techniques (Satischandra *et al.* 2007). The Greater Yellownape may be a particularly good beater for the Hair-crested Drongo, providing them with increased foraging opportunities.

To my knowledge, this is the first ever reporting on the foraging interactions between Hair-crested Drongo and Greater Yellownape from the Kalimpong region of India. However, my preliminary findings warrant further in-depth studies in this direction to know how the species are benefitted in mixed-species foraging flocks, whether the behaviour is only for improving feeding efficiency or for better predator protection.

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