

## Short Notes

### CATCHING PREY IN A 'FLYCATCHER MANNER'.

The manner in which *Ficedula* and *Muscicapa* spp. and some *Phylloscopus* spp. catch their insect prey in the air is well documented in various works. Other species, however, though having a totally different feeding behaviour, are sometimes observed to resort to this 'flycatcher method' when provided with the occasion. It is not uncommon to observe Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* and Spanish Sparrows *Passer hispaniolensis* catching winged ants in the air during the latter's 'swarming flight' which frequently takes place after the rain. These ants are spotted flying up in the air by the birds which stay on the look-out on TV aeriels, telegraph poles and other vantage posts. The Spanish Sparrow has also been observed by the authors chasing *Cicada orni* in flight when this large insect is disturbed from its 'shrill whistling' post. In many cases, however, it has been noted that the Spanish Sparrow fails in its attempt, which is almost hilarious to observe, to catch the Cicada which swerves madly about flying erratically. The Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*, which mainly picks its prey from the ground, may also be observed making sorties after flying insects which it watches from its rocky perch.

The Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* usually flies down from its vantage look-out post to pick its prey below on the ground. However it has also been observed to catch flying insects in the air. One was noted doing this continuously on 5th May 1979 at Ramla Valley. A male Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* was observed for nearly half an hour doing the same thing at Lunzjata on 9th February 1980. Mosquitoes and flies were quite abundant and the Sardinian Warbler, in a *Ficedula hypoleuca* manner was leaving repeatedly its post on the lowest branch of an almond tree to pick the flying insects.

A Roller *Coracias garrulus* was also seen catching flying insects which it spotted from its perch on the top of a Carob tree at Fiddien on 1st May 1980. It was observed doing this for nearly fifteen minutes until it was disturbed (G. Bonett, pers. comm.).

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### ~~INSTANCES OF BIRDS RE-LAYING IN SAME NEST CONTAINING INFERTILE EGGS.~~

~~During a search for Fan-tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncidis* nests at Fiddien on 10th June 1980, a female was flushed from a nest containing four eggs. The nest was next inspected on 16th June when the female was again incubating. On 23rd June the nest was found unattended and the four eggs were cold. It was presumed to have been deserted, probably as a result of the eggs being infertile. On 28th June, while ringing a brood in a nearby nest, a female was seen leaving the presumed deserted nest. On inspection it was found to contain seven eggs. All were identical in colour - bluish white speckled with orange-red forming a light zone at the larger end. On 1st July the nest contained eight eggs which were again being incubated by the female. On subsequent visits on 8th and 10th July the female was found incubating the eight eggs on both occasions. On the next visit on 16th July, only broken eggs were found (the exact number could not be determined); all appeared to be infertile. The nest itself had not been disturbed.~~

~~In June 1977 an unmated female Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa stiiata* sitting on four eggs at a site at Buskett laid at least two more eggs in the same nest after incubating the original clutch of infertile eggs for at least twenty days (Sultana & Gauci - *II-Merill* 20:24).~~

~~In spring 1980, of three eggs in a Spectacled Warbler's *Sylvia conspicillata* nest at Ghadira only one hatched. On 19th April the nest contained two eggs and a pultus about four days old. Seven days later the fledgling had disappeared and the nest contained three eggs - the fresh egg being slightly larger than the other two, one of which had been pushed on to the rim of the nest. The nest was subsequently deserted.~~

~~A similar possible case of a Spectacled Warbler's nest which contained eight eggs has been recorded by J. Attard Montalto (*II-Merill* 20:25).~~

~~Though such cases are obviously exceptional, care has to be taken in recording clutch size when an unusual number of eggs is found in a nest.~~

~~Charles Gauci & Joe Sultana~~